ISLE OF THORNS

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

ISLE OF THORNS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

GREEN APPLE HARVEST
STARBRACE
THE END OF THE HOUSE OF ALARD
THE CHALLENGE TO SIRIUS
SUSSEX GORSE
TAMARISK TOWN
JOANNA GODDEN
THE FOUR ROADS
THE TRAMPING METHODIST

E. P. DUTTON & CO.

Isle of Thorns

BY

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

"The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom"
Blake

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ISLE OF THORNS

PART I

". . . Living private,
Without acquaintance of more sweet companions
Than the old inmates of my love, my thoughts,
I day by day frequented silent groves
And solitary walks. One morning early
This accident encountered me. . . ."

Ford's *Lover's Melancholy*.

Isle of Thorns

PART I

CHAPTER I

AN HOUR AFTER SUNRISE

THE newly risen sun was bright enough to wake the sheep, but not warm enough to dry the dew on their fleeces, and the wind that puffed across the Forest made Raphael Moore shiver. Now and then he turned to face the sun and wind, together in the east, and to dream at the clouds which they crimsoned and scattered. No morning cold could prevent this brooding of the heath which rolled up behind him into the bice of Slumber Wood, and sloped down before him into the golden blues of the weald.

He had left the road, dark and dew-washed between the Forest banks, and was following a sheep-track through the gorse. Ahead of him a broken chimney stood against the sky, and to reach it he left even the path, and crushed through the tangle of young growth till from a pond, suddenly revealed in a cup of green, the remains of a cart-track led direct to the thicket of alder and thorn from which the chimney rose.

Raphael stopped, and deliberately and rather delicately brushed adhering nature from his trousers. He was well dressed, in the simplicity demanded by country mud. He sometimes reproached himself for his extravagance in having

his clothes made at Brighton—many men with incomes less strait than his did not despise the Maresfield tailor—but he found consolation in the thought that he had a better money's-worth, not merely in stuff and make but in earthly bliss—for Moore found life more bearable when his clothes were well cut.

As he walked up the cart-track towards Isle of Thorns, a rough calculation told him he was doing this for about the two thousandth time. For six years he had been secretary to Professor Wetherill at Legsheath, and had trudged to his work every morning by way of Isle of Thorns. When the mornings were early and fine he rose at six or thereabouts, and took his breakfast with him. For wet dark days there was the carrier's cart for two miles of road. But there was always Isle of Thorns; he always walked from Vetchery to Allfornought, across that mile of heath by the ruined homestead, and always stopped there, if not for a meal, then for a glance, and a sniff at that strange smell which haunts old cottages.

At Legsheath he was often lectured by the Professor on the amount of shoe-leather he put into his day's work. Wetherill could not understand any one staying longer than he was absolutely obliged in the open air or walking a foot further on the open road. The fact that one's old nurse let lodgings was no reason for planting oneself three miles from one's typewriter. But Raphael was invariably punctual, so his complaints were forced to take the form of advice.

He would have been utterly contemptuous had he known of those breakfasts at Isle of Thorns. Moore himself sometimes wondered at them. Ten years ago he would have laughed at any suggestion of their concealment in his future. But the last ten years had taught him that a man must have his secret place, which is the outward sign of his inward state. Isle of Thorns was Raphael's secret place, alone on the great south slope of Ashdown Forest, ensnared in a few dark trees. It was sweet for a man to eat his bread there, in the peace of its mellow decays, conscious that he had

never seen a living face there, except his own, reflected in rainpools among the stones.

It was hallowed to him also by the memory of grief. It was here he had first wept for Margaret. During her illness and immediately after her death, those tears had refused to come; they had been like fire at the back of his eyes. Then had come the journey into Sussex, his establishment with Neddy at Towncreep Farm—then his first wild walk on the Forest, and the finding of Isle of Thorns, standing sun-wrapt against a fading sky. He had cried there, and had gone there the next day to cry. The third day he had slept there, his first quiet sleep. Then, after he had started work at Legsheath, he found a way across the Forest, which passed by Isle of Thorns. The place was a necessity, an imperative antithesis to the crowded meals at Towncreep—when Eliza Huggett's boarders brought themselves and their shop to table—and to the long hours at Legsheath, where the window was always shut, and the green stretches of the garden were provoking to cramped thighs.

He turned and looked south before he went behind the trees. Below him on the green of Chelwood Common were some tents and ascending smoke, another of those shows of which they were so fond at Chelwood, with its welter of half-naked children, its crack of rifles, and prance of wooden horses. Raphael frowned, the well-bred frown of a man who has never frowned at anything worse than the doings of Chelwood Common. He disliked grime and noise and naked children, the hullooing of servant girls on a holiday, and the shifts of hunger-mouthed commerce. His world was a holy cell, cut in the rock of the past, high above the sand-storm desert of the present. He thanked blue Heaven that Isle of Thorns stood out of the turmoil, far from the farthest wandering feet.

He passed behind the trees, and went into the cottage. It had two rooms and a chimney. The outer room, to enter which one went down three broken steps, was half unroofed, and between the cobbles of the floor young things were grow-

ing. Strange to say, Raphael had not noticed these before; he wondered if they had been there other springs, or if now for the first time the sun and April woke them.

He sat down on the bottom step, leaned his head against the door-post, and unwrapped his parcel of bread and ham. He could see both the inner and the outer world—outside the thorns and alders against the pale sky, inside the discoloured stones of the hearth, with the black chimney above them, where the wind stirred and moaned. He wished he did not see the young green too—small blades of grass and tiny heart-shaped leaves that promised violets. They spoiled the character of the place; hitherto he had loved Isle of Thorns because it was all Past, but here was a Future peeping between the stones.

He ate his meal contentedly, plain and stodgy as it was, different as it was from the breakfasts of years ago. Then he rose, brushed the crumbs from his knees, and was about to leave the cottage, when he was startled by a sound from the inner room. He did not often go into the inner room—it was roofed, and sometimes the sun on its decaying walls gave it a pungent stuffiness. To-day he hesitated whether he should look in or not—what he heard was probably only a rat. The sound was not repeated, but this very fact was enough to send him to the doorway. Perhaps it was a poor stray cat—he loved cats.

For two full minutes utter silence brooded over Isle of Thorns. Raphael stood in the doorway of the inner room, motionless as a statue, staring straight before him.

It did not require a moment's thought to know that she was no rag-bag from Chelwood Common. Her clothes were shabby, it was true, torn and muddied, but they were not of a kind that suggested the caravan. She wore a striped flannel shirt—such as schoolgirls and typists wear, but collarless, and open at the throat—and a short blue serge skirt, which, in spite of the mud with which it was caked, proclaimed good tailoring in every seam. But it was her face which gave the biggest lie to her circumstances. It was no

mumper's face—the delicate skin wore only its first tan; the mouth, sensitive in every curve, was like a child's above the firm little chin. Over her forehead, almost till it reached the eyebrows, massed her hair, which, though evidently not brushed last night, still wore the gloss of many earlier brushings, and was tumbling, not from the frounce and crimp of the gipsy-woman, but from soft braids uncurling on her neck.

Raphael moved a step or two forward. Something was telling him to go away, that, in fact, he ought to go away—it was bad manners to stare. But something else was urging him to stay, telling him that if he left Isle of Thorns now, with this mystery behind him, he would never find peace there again.

The girl tossed, for the sun had crept from her forehead to her eyes; she lifted an arm from which the sleeve fell back, but did not wake. Moore noticed that her head lay on a bundle tied up in blue calico; he was short-sighted, and had come quite near her before he saw protruding from this something that looked like a strand of hair. Yes, it was hair. A crowd of newspaper headlines rushed into his memory, and he drew back. He must be dreaming—for two thousand mornings he and the wind alone had haunted Isle of Thorns, and here, on the two thousand and first, was a girl, asleep, mysterious, her head on a baneful pillow, rippling with human hair.

Raphael took the hair and pulled gingerly—it struck him for the first time that he was a man of action. The thing yielded to his hand, and came out, a long swathe with a little three-pronged comb at the end of it. At the same moment the girl woke.

She sat up, leaning on her elbow, and blinked at him and the sun. Still half in dreamland, she smiled. Then the full flush of recollection came—away with the smile and the drowsy blink! She was on her feet, arranging her dress, smoothing her hair, in a series of quick, confused, ineffectual movements, staring at him nervously the while.

"Hullo! you've got my hair!" she cried suddenly.

Raphael fumbled with the strand. He felt that his conduct needed explanation—hers, for some strange reason, had ceased to mystify.

"I—I'm sorry," he stuttered. "I often come here, and when I saw you asleep——"

"You wondered who the dickens I was. But you might let a woman's hair alone."

She spoke in clear, breezy tones like a boy. She had evidently sized him pretty accurately and seen no need to maintain her attitude of suspicion.

"I didn't know what it was."

She took it out of his hand, and began to twist it round her head.

"That improves matters a little. Great Scott! I am in a mess."

"Er—can I do anything for you?"

He was face to face with circumstances which even the wildest flights of his imagination had not taught him to foresee. At the same time he was queerly conscious that everything was happening quite naturally. He did not feel that he had passed through the incident before, as he had felt on other, more trivial, occasions, but that the incident was normal—it was the rest of life that was abnormal and gave contrast, and this moment seemed more in tune with the spirit of Isle of Thorns than his two thousand solitary mornings.

She answered his question as soon as her mouth was empty of hairpins.

"No thank you—nothing. I'm a gentleman tramp."

Raphael did not know what to say.

"You're surprised—perhaps you're shocked. Well, I ought to expect it. Male gentleman tramps are fairly common, but somehow it's not a popular trade with females."

"Have you been tramping long?"

"Only a week—real, genuine tramping, that's to say. Before that it was a walking tour, and I had another girl

with me; but she would talk about the British Museum."

"May I—indeed you mustn't be offended with me—but don't you think it's rather dangerous?"

"Of course it is! If it wasn't, it wouldn't be any fun. And I simply had to get rid of Peg. She's quite a decent girl, but there's no fresh air in her, and it's to get fresh air I came into the country. I live in London, you know, and that's death to the imagination."

"I should have thought just the opposite." Almost unconsciously Raphael was slipping into a conversation.

"I don't suppose you've lived there much. If you had, you'd have found yourself slipping into the London groove. Nobody in London cares a twopenny blank for any one outside it. You'd think England was all London and nothing else. And every one's got the same deadly conventional way of being unconventional. Oh, I felt that if I stayed in London a day longer I'd lose my soul. So I spent every penny I'd got in arrears of rent, except a pound for roadside expenses, collared Peg, shut up the flat, and set out on foot for Brighton. It would have been a first-class tour if only Peg had stuck to it, but it got too unconventional for her, and she went home."

"Have you no other friends who might join you? It really isn't safe for you to tramp about alone. Any one can see that you're a—a lady."

"But I'm not—I'm a downright vulgar female. I wasn't three years ago. Three years ago I erred rather on the sober side. Then suddenly I lost myself and got all into a muddle. I'm rather sick of it, and I think if I wandered about a little, all free in the fields, I might find myself again."

She had sat down on the earthen floor, and Raphael was sitting beside her, feeling suddenly tremendously enthusiastic about something, he could not tell what. It certainly was not her personal beauty, for with the restfulness of sleep her face had lost its childish attraction. It was the most hard-working face he had ever seen; every time she spoke the lines at her mouth twisted and creased, and between her eye-

brows appeared an agonized pucker; whenever she smiled her narrow grey eyes nearly disappeared. Her little hands waved about in quaint, grasping attitudes—on the whole she reminded him of a monkey, but at the same time impressed him with the idea that he rather liked monkeys.

"Do you always sleep out of doors?" he asked her. "It's very——"

"—Dangerous, yes, of course. But I really couldn't spend last night in the caravan, so I wandered round till I found a den good enough to shake down in. I'm with Stanger's Show, you know, on Chelwood Common."

"Chelwood!"

He fired the word at her sharply—it forced him back into his prejudices.

"I thought you were alone."

"And so I am—I merely joined Stanger's as a sort of protection. Not that I mind danger—I love it—but I like to feel I've something at my back. Besides, one gets to know human nature—those people are simply splendid, all fresh air."

"They're a bad lot—I should almost think you'd be safer alone. Really, you must give up this sort of thing. It's horrible to think of a young girl—a gentlewoman—exposed to all the dangers of the road, and associating with tramps and scoundrels."

He spoke stiffly but vehemently. The situation was reversed; her conduct seemed to him unnatural, monstrous, and his, in dictating to her, as fitting as necessary.

"I don't know who you are," he continued earnestly, "and perhaps I've no right to talk to you like this. But ordinary decency makes me beg you to give up a life in which you're every day exposed to danger, and which cannot fail to be misconstrued by your friends; your people——"

"I've no people. I never had any one but Mother, and she's dead. As for my friends, Peg and the others, I don't care a hang what they think; I've myself to look after, and I'm not going to lose the best years of my life in a beastly

London muddle. I'm just beginning to live the life that suits me, that's bringing me out and building me up. I love the Chelwood Common people——"

"I wonder they haven't murdered you before this."

"They're not conventional enough for that; besides, Andy would see to 'em if they did."

"Who's Andy?"

"Oh, didn't I tell you?" He knew that she knew that she had not, but he was beginning to realize that she was scarcely so frank as her free careless voice suggested—"Oh, Andy's the best of the whole thing. I met him in London three years ago"—she smiled to herself without knowing it—"then I lost sight of him, and last Tuesday, just as I was being frightened out of my life by some horrid men outside a pub. at Hartfield, who should appear but Mr. Andy Baird, who after an adventurous career in the Estate Duty Office, had chucked his collar into the ditch and taken to the road. He runs the shooting gallery at Stanger's—he's a character, a thrilling psychological study, a weird mixture of the Scotchman, the gipsy, and the journalist—it was he who introduced me to Old Stanger and his wife and Joe and the others. I came down with them from Hartfield, and I think I shall stick to them till they get to Chichester."

"I hope you will do nothing of the kind; really, your affair's more serious than I thought. First you tell me you're alone, which is bad, then that you're with a travelling show, which is worse, then that you're with a man friend, which is worst of all."

"Excuse me"—there was anger in her voice—"I'm not 'with' Mr. Baird at all. I'm travelling with the people he's travelling with, that's all. I really see very little of him—we're not connected in the slightest degree. You allow your imagination to run away with you."

"You're rather off the tack. It was not my intention to imply you were 'connected' with any one. I merely wished to point out that your position is foolish and dangerous and liable to grave misconception, and I maintain that still."

"Thank you; I am quite able to take care of myself, and would rather not be advised by the average British male, who doesn't like to see his female walk five miles alone, or have tea in an A.B.C. without a chaperon."

"Then I shall not trouble you any further. I've done my best, as I was bound to do. I can't see that anything but harm can come of your behaviour, but I'm unable to help you against your will."

Their eyes met, hers defiant, his disgusted. He picked up his cap, rose, and walked away. On the threshold of Isle of Thorns he paused and listened, but no sound came from the inner room. Well, he had done his best; he could do no more. A ship had passed in the night, hung out signals of distress, but refused help. The darkness must swallow her up again.

CHAPTER II

RETROGRESSIVE

For the first time, he was late at Legsheath. Wetherill was furious; Raphael actually met him in the avenue, a dark, gesticulating, wiry little bounder, with the face of forty, which he had had since his teens and would still have if he lived to be a hundred. He had been Professor of Oriental Languages at a Northern university, but had retired from the Chair some years ago, and was writing a book on Language and the Lost Sixth Sense. For relief, he edited anthologies, all of an open-air, pastoral character, to be published with end-papers of fields and streams.

It was anthology work that morning, always the most trying to the Professor's temper, and Raphael soon became so deeply involved in the consequences of his unpunctuality that he had no time to think of its causes. However, as the day wore on, Wetherill's wrath abated, and Raphael, wandering in Elizabethan gardens, slipped out of the present.

> "Blame but thyself that has misdone,
> And well deserved to have blame;
> Change thou thy way . . ."

But she would not change it; perhaps he had been rude to her. He flushed slightly at the idea.

> "Farewell, Unknown! for though thou break
> My strings in spite with great disdain . . ."

The typewriter moved but slowly as he sat applying Sir Thomas Wyatt to his case as innocently as any Evangelist applied the Prophets—

> "Yet have I found out for thy sake
> Strings for to string my lute again."

But he hadn't. The strings she had snapped so spitefully should not be mended; he would tune no more arguments for her self-will.

It was not until he was back at Towncreep Farm that the past really became the past. Till then he had not so much remembered it as slipped back into it, and his attitude had been one of revisualization rather than of criticism. At Towncreep, however, anything abnormal in his life was bound to slip outside him; the atmosphere of six years damped the fireworks of an hour. Among those old Elizabethans it had been easy enough to take a poetic view of life, and to regard outspoken interviews with unknown maidens as normal and relishable; but seated at the Towncreep eggs-and-bacon, between Mr. Griggs, the French-gardening pupil, and Cecily Evans, the Church-school teacher—passing the salt to Eliza Huggett, from whose mild eyes his childhood seemed always to be staring at him reproachfully, his own brown-legged son swinging his shoes against him under the table—all values were changed, and he began to feel alarmed at himself, and a trifle shocked.

He feared he had said too much. The idea of minding his own business had not thriven with him as a mere matter of policy—it owed its strength to a fastidious refinement and a perfect breeding. He did not like to remember certain things he had said about the man Baird, for instance. They smacked unsavoury, not so much through his fault as through hers. He hated to think she believed him capable of suggesting a "connexion" between her and Baird. His words had been plain through his very confidence that she, a young girl, would not take them to involve more than their meaning—that the fact she had a man friend with her on her rambles made her position even more unconventional and liable to misconstruction than if she had tramped alone. No nice girl would have taken him to imply worse. She could not be a nice girl. She was vulgar, in spite of the refinement of her face, vain, and rather fast. He remembered the false hair she had been so brazen about. Ugh!

Raphael had not much experience of girls. Indeed, Margaret was the only girl he had known intimately, and most people said that Margaret was above the ordinary run of girls. Other people had said, more uncharitably, that Margaret was not a girl at all, being thirty when he married her, an adoring youth of twenty-one. How he had loved her, and how loveworthy she had been! He could recall each line of her pale austere face, each tone of her calm, commanding voice. She had ruled him, every one said, but he had loved being ruled by her. It had been terrible when her guidance was taken from him, so soon, too, after he had lost the fonder authority of his father and mother.

Sorrow had fallen, swift and unmerciful, on a heart virgin of her cruelties. Raphael was the son of a High Church priest, and his brothers, little Michael and Gabriel, had died in early childhood, leaving him to his parents' special cares and prayers. They had watched in agony over his babyhood and boyhood, fearful lest they should lose him too, their last hope. Every physical hardship, every mental trial that their love could prevent, had been spared him. His schooldays had been cut short on account of some supposed delicacy, and he had "read" with his father—no grim grammars or text-books, but volumes of old romanticks, lay and clerkly, treasuries of Elizabethan poetry and Carolean prose.

When he had declared his wish to marry Margaret Worth there had been no effort to dissuade him, in spite of his ridiculous age. On the contrary, matters had been smoothed and arranged, and the wedding took place, to the amusement of many.

From that day his star began to set. He was called back from his honeymoon to his mother's deathbed, and a year later she was followed by his father, a bereavement cankered by money troubles. The good Vicar, young enough to be confident of many more years, had not saved a penny—indeed, there had been none to spare, for the marriage with Margaret could not have taken place had he not made his

son an annual allowance of two hundred pounds, which now ceased with his death.

For the last few years Raphael had worked as secretary to an engineering firm, but a hundred pounds, though it makes all the difference as a supplement to two hundred, is poverty when taken alone. He now had a little son, and how to provide for him and Margaret was the problem of many white nights.

It was Margaret who solved it, as she solved all her husband's problems. Of course, being perfectly bred, she had never been taught how to earn a living, but she had received a good general education, and was exceedingly musical. Raphael, though his commercial training had been limited by his parents' tender improvidence to a course or two at Pitman's, was cultured and well read. Why should they not take pupils? They did.

All day long Raphael continued to work at the office, and by lamplight taught machinized youths to love Burton and Browne, and to quote from Roister Doister, and the Spanish Tragedy. Margaret confined herself chiefly to music, but had occasional battles over Chardenal and Otto. Life was beginning to flow on lines as peaceful, if more chastened, than before, when the ruler of the household, the solver of problems, fell ill. For a few days it was "only a touch of influenza," then it was pleuro-pneumonia, then it was Death.

Raphael was stunned, staggered, by the blow. Somehow, Margaret was not a woman one expected to die. It was neither health nor muscle which prevented the thought, but she was so vital and interior a part of the machinery of life that one could not imagine her dropping out. What was he to do without her? Never before had he known what it was to be without a superior brain to guide and scold him. Now he was alone. He had been so completely wrapped up in his home, his schooldays had been cut so short, that he had had little opportunity and no inclination for making friends. There was no one to look up to, to defer to; at twenty-six he was flung for the first time on his own judgment.

His one idea was to remove himself from the scene of departed peace. But wherever he went he must have work, and some one to look after his child. He made provision for the latter first—his old nurse, Eliza Huggett, who was repenting at leisure a marriage made in haste, let lodgings at Towncreep Farm, into which her husband had been "put" out of compassion by his brothers. She would undertake to board him and Neddy for a moderate sum, and would give the boy that care she had longed so tearfully to lavish on children of her own—if only Raphael could find work within possible distance of Towncreep. He was more fortunate in this than he had expected; an old parishioner of his father's knew Professor Wetherill, and finding that he was in need of a secretary who, besides being proficient in the mechanical part of his trade, must have some brains and some acquaintance with literature, recommended young Moore for the post. But it was his knowledge of the Elizabethan dramatists that won it; calling, depressed and nervous, at Legsheath, he found the Professor hunting for some unhackneyed quotation on the lute, to be included in his *Anthology of Antient Musick*. Raphael at once remembered the Prologue to David and Bethsabe:—

> "Upon the bosom of his ivory lute
> The cherubins and angels laid their breasts . . ."

and to this piece of luck he owed his appointment.

Accordingly, he and Neddy removed from Dulwich to Towncreep Farm, and there life had been monotoned not uncheerfully for six years. Raphael still shrank from the shriek of the world, fed chiefly on memories and the beauty of the Sussex woods, but his wound was gently healing, and he was able to look back on the days of sorrow with thankfulness and calm. Without much introspection, he could see that sorrow had cleansed him—"Before I was troubled I went wrong"—he had shown the usual shortcomings of the spoilt protected child—a certain self-love, a certain conceit, a certain laziness; but sorrow had made him too tender-

hearted to be selfish, too quiet for conceit, too much in need of occupation to be lazy. When sermons were preached in church on the beneficent effects of sorrow, he would fold his gentle hands, and smile in peace and pleasure. His harbour was won, tears had washed him there, and henceforth there was no more to be done. The shipping of green seas was over—he had only to wait, gently rocking in those quiet waters, till night came with a call.

His only trouble, and that only occasionally endured, was his inability to feel rightly towards Neddy. He realized that a man in his position ought to yearn with all his strength and tenderness upon his only son. But his attitude was one of curious detachment—he admired the child's clean-built limbs and rough head, he sometimes felt proud that this bronzed, aloof creature was his, but he knew that there was no bond between them, that each went his separate way, and sometimes it worried him—not always.

Was it true that the Land of Memory in which he lived was a cold land, where love could not thrive, where, if one found peace, one also found repression? Sometimes the question would start at him, when Neddy said good-night, or brought him a bird's nest, or bruised his knee. But it was a question from which he could easily escape into the old calm, the land where shadows danced and lights were low.

It was not so easy to escape from another question—the question he had been asked that morning at Isle of Thorns. The strange thing was that he did not know what that question was exactly. All he knew was that for some reason or other that morning was marked with a note of interrogation. He lay awake in bed some hours, trying to answer it, but it was a case of "first tell us the dream and then we will show thee the interpretation thereof." What was it that she had asked him with her narrow grey eyes, she who was not a "nice girl," of whom Margaret would have disapproved? His peace was troubled; he felt angry with her, as he lay with a square of moonlight on his breast, and watched Orion's sword, hanging in the mystery of the sky.

CHAPTER III

MYSTERIUM MAGNUM

THE strange thing was that the next morning he did not care about it in the least. A few hours' sleep—and what was it to him whether he had or had not said too much to a rather vulgar-minded girl? He forgot all the sadness of the question he could neither answer nor understand, as he helter-skeltered through the morning's routine—the cold plunge, the descent of the clean stairs that smelled of scrubbing, the visit to the kitchen to say good-morning to Eliza Huggett and take his parcel of bread and ham. Then came the invariable nod to John Huggett, digging scowlingly at a row of evil-looking cabbages, the wave of the hand, which he sometimes wished more affectionate, to Neddy, peering wistfully from his attic window—then the keen air of the Forest whipping his cheeks, the green sky above him, dappled with purple pink-edged clouds, under his feet the spring of the sheep-trodden turf, the tenderness of the young heather, the crackling of the old.

For about half a mile his path lay in a hollow clumped with hazel, and the high spreads of the Forest were shut off. Gradually the track sloped, the tops of pines showed above the ridge, then the gaunt chimney. He did not loiter much that morning, for he was resolved to be early at Legsheath. There would be nothing to-day, he hoped, to detain him at Isle of Thorns.

The pond, the track, the tree-clump—and he was there, sniffing at the smell of gracious old-age which was part of his morning's delight. He looked into the inner room as a precaution, but he did not expect to find any one there

again—he was right, and gave a little start of grieved surprise as he realized that he was also disappointed. He sat down as usual on the door-step, but his teeth had not met in his food before he was suddenly confronted once again by the abnormal.

In the corner, hid by the darkness at his first entrance, was a piece of paper fastened to the wall. He rose for a closer look, and saw that it was secured to a fragment of moss by a hairpin. The colour rushed furiously to his face, as he snatched it down. It was covered with writing of a rather breezy character, soaring h's and l's, i's dotted and t's crossed at random, yet with the savour of neatness in the clear vowels and firm capitals.

"I'm afraid I was rude to you yesterday, and I'm sorry. Can you forgive me? I was really quite upset about it last night. I feel that you misunderstood me—I haven't explained things enough. Could you meet me here for tea this afternoon, and then I could make things clearer? I don't like people thinking me worse than I really am, and it was partly my fault you got such a bad impression of me yesterday—though I won't say entirely.

"Sally Odiarne. M.M."

The colour deepened on Raphael's cheeks, and his hands quivered; an insurgent joy was in his pulses. Unlike two-thirds of humanity, he did not attempt to deny it—his heart forced few surprises on him, and he always took them meekly. But he was sorry he was glad. What was there so to rejoice about? and had he not completely forgotten the frets of yesterday?

Evidently not, for he realized that part of his pleasure was due to the fact that this afternoon the incomplete would be made complete, the gap would be filled, the rag-edged garment would be hemmed fairly. This afternoon—but what was he saying about this afternoon? Had he any intention, any right, to accept a crudely put invitation to tea with an unknown girl, alone at this lodge in the wilderness?

In thought and in taste there was nothing prudish about Raphael—the man who had been brought up on the Elizabethan dramatists and Carolean essayists could not fall short of a sane and intrepid mind. But exteriorly he clung fast to certain conventions, implanted at the Vicar's tea-table and nurtured by Margaret's austerity.

Memories of Dulwich and Margaret arose and blew over him like a hot wind. He was not going to do anything unconventional for the sake of this little harum-scarum. Let her play the fool with men of her own stamp, not of his.

But he was not in Dulwich, he was in Isle of Thorns, on April-sunned Ashdown, and the wind was as cool as wine. As he looked round at the old stones, the spirit of eternal youth seemed to blow into him. Once more he was confronted by the strange thought that it was the daring and the abnormal that belonged to Isle of Thorns—the cottage was like some beautiful benign old man, loving and encouraging the pranks of children. Yes; he would accept his invitation. Dulwich be hanged!

He read the note through again, and paused over the signature. "Sally"—she looked it. "Odiarne"—that was a Sussex name; he had seen it on tombstones at Rye. "M.M." —whatever was that? He gravely went through a list of academical titles, but could remember none thus capitalled.

The next thing to do was to write his acceptance. The wildest adventure could not have made Moore casual, and tearing a leaf out of his pocket-book he expressed his "great pleasure in accepting her kind invitation," folded it neatly, and addressed it to "Miss S. Odiarne, M.M." Sally was a name which breathed too great a familiarity to be used in any context, however decorous; and though he was doubtful about the "M.M." he did not like to leave it out, in case it hurt her feelings.

At Legsheath it was the Sixth Sense which he had to contend with that morning. The Professor had a theory that language is a comparatively recent growth before which men conversed with one another by means of telepathic commu-

nication, after the fashion of animals, but in a higher degree. Raphael had always been impressed by the idea, but to-day it seemed insufficient; he felt that Wetherill ought to carry it further. For he was convinced that the power of telepathic converse belonged not only to animals but to places. Only that morning he had had sharp argument with Isle of Thorns, in which the cottage had borne off the victory.

He wondered how soon he would be free. Saturday was nominally a half-holiday, but the Professor had an awkward habit of working overtime. The day passed drearily behind closed windows, and an incursion into the *Anthology of Meadows* only served to emphasize the general stuffiness. At last, however, and fortunately not late, Wetherill snapped out "That'll do," and left the room. It was his way of dismissing his secretary, and nothing now lay between Raphael and Isle of Thorns but the boisterous sweeps of the Forest. He brushed his hair and his clothes carefully before he left. He was glad that the weather was fine enough to justify some niceness of apparel; his green suit had been worn many times, but it had the grace of a perfect cut and fit; a hint of rain, and he might have been wearing his blue serge, a better example of Eliza Huggett's skill in mending than of wear for a lady's tea-party.

Having been confronted with the fact that he was looking forward to that tea-party, he made no attempt to deny it, but quite innocently accepted the situation. Further, having proved to himself, or rather, having had it proved to him by Isle of Thorns, that he had a right to look forward to it, he asked his conscience no more questions. His only anxiety was lest he should be late—it was a few minutes after half-past four when he came in sight of the cottage.

He was at once struck by a phenomenon—out of the nude forsaken-looking chimney was pouring a curl of smoke, eddying with delicate savour to his nostrils. From the high ground above, he drank in the smell of a wood-fire with a peculiar tightening of his throat. Alas! the smoke was not confined to the chimney, and it did not smell so sweet as it

twisted in blue wreaths against the roof, making Raphael cough violently on his entrance.

"I'm so sorry," came a voice from out of the reek, "but I shouldn't think this chimney's had a fire in it for generations."

"I'm sure it hasn't—here, let me help you."

He was down on his knees, arranging the sticks, and it was some minutes before he had time to glance at Sally Odiarne, crouching behind his shoulder.

"Thank you so much," she said as the air cleared slowly. "I'm sorry you've had all this bother, but people who come to tea with me always do. If the fire doesn't smoke, then it's the chimney that's alight, or the bathroom tap that's burst; and once the ceiling came down at a highly psychological moment, and smashed my one and only tea-set, so that I had to eat out of the saucepan and drink out of the kettle for weeks.—I'm afraid this tea's rather rotten—it's Mrs. Joe's, and I don't know what it'll taste like without gin."

She was sitting on her heels, witch-like in the glow. She had evidently taken some pains with her toilet, for her shirt was worn with a neat belt and tie; she had coloured stockings, too, such as express the soul, and on her head was a little leather cap, with a quaint little curling feather—like a question-mark.

"I'm so glad you found my letter," she said with a touch of shyness in her voice, "I'd a kind of idea you might come back to this place, but I didn't dare face you. I felt I'd shocked you—put your back up."

He muttered some polite denials.

"Oh, don't; for I'm quite sure I did, and with most people I shouldn't have minded—I should have liked it. But with you——"

She was evidently unable to finish her sentence, for she looked at him half humorously, and smiled—a wide, questioning smile. It woke a response in him at once—his own slow smile, beginning in his eyes, passing to the corners of his mouth, finally half-revealing a row of milk-white teeth.

Both at once felt that all necessary explanation, counter-explanation, apology, counter-apology had been made; all the preliminaries of their intercourse were disposed of in a smile, and they passed immediately to more vital things.

"May I ask what's the meaning of the letters after your name—M.M.? They puzzled me."

Miss Odiarne laughed.

"Oh, that's for 'Mysterium Magnum.' It's what I've been calling myself ever since I read Boehme. It seems to me," she added in a lower voice, "that the old mystics were quite wrong when they spoke of the mystery of God. God is the clear morning redness—it is we who are the mystery. When I look up to God I seem to see infinite simplicity, infinite candour; when I look into myself I see nothing but fire and fogs. That's why I'm on the roads, for I hope that this utterly new life will help me to get a peep into myself, to seize myself if only by my garment's edge—then I shall be able to work."

He was surprised to see tears swim into the gipsy secret of her eyes.

"What's your work?" he asked gently.

"I write."

"Books!"

"Yes—don't look so dumbfounded. I daresay my conversation doesn't suggest to you anything surprising in the way of intellect, but you should just hear me talk sometimes."

"What sort of books do you write?"

"I've only written one, really—a novel. Of course you've never heard of it—*Ginger*, by Salome Odiarne. The *Morning Post* nearly ruined my morals for ever by calling it the best book of the week—the notice appeared on a Wednesday. The *Daily News* provided the necessary antidote by calling it the worst book We had read since We started reviewing."

"I hope it did well."

"Damnably."

Raphael blushed.

"You see, there was something wrong with it," said the girl in a small uncertain voice; "there was something missing —myself. I hadn't found myself, so I couldn't put myself into my book. I could put in style, observation, intuition, art, anything you like, but not the one thing needful. Oh, it nearly broke my heart when I found it out, and I vowed I would never write another book till it could be written in Sally Odiarne's blood as well as in Sally Odiarne's ink."

A light broke over Raphael's face.

"Ah, I see—you've come out to get copy."

"Indeed I haven't. I'd see myself da—hanged first! That's the British Public's stickiest idea—the novelist and his note-book—the stickiest and the stupidest. As if a thing which couldn't be remembered without notes was worth remembering!"

"I thought perhaps I'd found an excuse for you," and he smiled faintly.

"Don't bother about excuses. I've better than an excuse. I've a reason. You don't know what a state I've been in for the last three years. Mother died in 1907, and nine months later I met Andy Baird."

She coloured violently; partly, he thought, with annoyance. She evidently had not wanted to bring that name into the conversation. It must lurk very close to her tongue, for this was the second time she had been tricked into uttering it.

"I lost sight of him soon afterwards," she continued. "Look here, I'd better tell you the whole story, for I keep on saying more than I ought—so let's have it all out and be done. I wanted to lose sight of him—I don't know why, because I didn't feel a bit ashamed. Oh, it's all right—it wasn't anything very dreadful, only a flirtation—but such a queer one. I'd sworn I'd never let a man touch me, except the man I loved—all girls do. But the funny thing is that it's much easier to let oneself go with a man one doesn't love than with a man one does. I was rather fond of a boy once,

and I wouldn't speak to him for a fortnight because he tried to take my hand. But Andy . . . I didn't care for him a bit, and I'd only known him three hours . . . and yet I let him . . . somehow it was quite easy."

She was silent, still sitting on her heels, a little piece of nibbled cake in each hand, looking more quaintly simian than ever, but rather pathetic in her embarrassment.

"I know you don't understand," she said, as he held his tongue. "You're not the sort of man who would. Andy understands, though he's not nearly so nice as you, not so nice as me, even. Peg didn't understand. She asked me if I didn't hate myself—I didn't—I never suffered a pang, and yet my conscience at that time was in excellent working order. But somehow, I've never been the same since; all my ideas have got mixed. I only let myself go for an hour, and my whole life's topsy-turvy. It's just as if some one had put his hand in a tidy drawer, and flung all the things about—it only takes a second to do it, but it takes ages to put it right."

"Then—then," faltered Raphael, "do you think it wise to see so much of him now? Forgive me, a perfect stranger—but do you think it will help you to——"

"You don't understand. I'm bringing matters to a crisis. This man has upset me and he's got to pull me straight again. I believe he will. And now that we've finished tea, we may as well light up."

She pulled a cigarette-case out of her pocket.

"Have one—they're real Turks."

"No thank you."

"Don't you smoke?'

"Yes—but not often—at least——"

"Oh, come on. I know you're shocked, but you've got to unbend."

Raphael—whose daily smoke was confined by cruel economy to an American straight-cut after supper—unbent. Margaret did not approve of men smoking in the presence of women. What would she have said had she seen him

light Sally's cigarette for her, and then take one for himself, giddy and fragrant, an oasis in his desert of Virginians?

"You're sure you don't mind my smoking?" he said when it was lighted.

"Of course not! What am *I* doing?"

Her eyes were dancing again, and her face was creased with merriment. She had put off the serious mood—one could imagine that she was puffing it with the blue fragrant smoke from her little ring of a mouth.

She did not smoke hard; most of the time, her hand with its cigarette rested on her knee, while she talked to him of the literary life she had left, and later, as his confidence grew, of his own tastes and studies. Sally did not care much for the Elizabethans; her admiration was rather for the full-cheeked, coarse-hided novelists of the eighteenth century, and her manner of discussing them was occasionally so frank that Raphael came to the conclusion that she did not know the meaning of half the expressions she used.

Strange to say, she had ceased to shock him now. He took her quite naturally and simply, apart from comparisons with Margaret, and had soon slipped into the attitude of mind—by no means one of approval—necessary for her appreciation. The biographical fragments she let fall told him of the peculiar loneliness of the fight this little soul had waged for twenty-three years—she was quite candid about her age. Her father had been the son of a Sussex squire—hence her journey was something in the nature of a homecomnig. She had never known him, neither was she sure why he had left Sussex. Her mother, who had been an actress, lived by giving elocution lessons. On her death, Sally found herself in the possession of two hundred pounds, with which she took a flat in the neighbourhood of Earl's Court. For some time she lived on her capital, hoping to make an income by writing; but her book brought her in only about twenty pounds, she earned nothing more, her rent fell into arrears, and her incursion into the highways had its business side.

Raphael was wonderfully engrossed, mysteriously delighted. He sat with his back to the door, watching her as she crouched on the tiles, the early moonlight soon chasing the firelight from her face, while through the broken roof above her shone the evening star.

Suddenly a shadow fell across her forehead and her cheek. He started and went cold. It seemed part of herself as it lay in her eyes, and he did not look behind him to see what cast it.

"Hullo!"

She stood up suddenly, and he looked over his shoulder. Leaning against the doorpost was a man, his hands in his pockets, his head on one side, his eyes half shut.

"Andy!"

The man came down the steps, glanced round for something to lean against, and found the chimney.

"I've come to fetch you, Sal; it's half-past six."

"Is it really? Well, I suppose I must go. Let me introduce you. Mr. Baird—Mr.——Great Scott! I've been talking to you for two hours, and I don't know your name."

"Moore," said Raphael stiffly.

He was not much impressed by the newcomer, the boss of the rifle and revolver range at Stanger's. He was a fine figure of a man, though perhaps a trifle too stout. His face was striking, with its strongly cut nose and chin, between which the slight moustache was nearly in shadow. He wore a velveteen suit and leather gaiters, and looked his part of vagrant far more effectively than Sally; but it was no doubt an easier trick for him than for her. He entirely lacked the refinement of face, or rather of expression, which would have betrayed her had she been dressed as a fishwife, and his drawling voice with its slight Scotch lilt, his half-shut eyes, and lounging attitude made Raphael bristle.

"Well, help me put up the tea-things," said Sally.

"Must you go?—must you really go? I can't bear the thought of your going back to Chelwood Common."

It was only during the last minute that it had been unbear-

able. Before then it had scarcely troubled him—the present had been quite enough with its undefinable allure. But now Chelwood Common and Stanger's World-Famous Show had become linked up with the person of Mr. Andy Baird, and something far more vital than a sense of decorum made him shudder at the thought of Sally's returning to them.

"I wish you'd go back to London, or go on an ordinary walking tour with a friend. You don't know the dangers you run through being alone."

"I'm not alone. I'm with Mrs. Joe," said Sally with a leer.

"And you're with me, Sal. Don't I count for a buttress?"

She fixed him with her eye.

"Not that I know of."

Baird grinned.

"I did three hours ago. Then it was all man Andy and gipsy life—to say nothing of gipsy love."

Sally glared—then laughed, but obviously on the wrong side of her mouth.

"Don't talk nonsense," she snapped, "and here, Andy, carry the basket."

In silence the three went up the steps, and single file through the bushes. The chimney seemed to look at them forlornly as if it could not have its joke with them any more. Nor could Raphael, for that matter. As he crushed the young thyme of the track, pearled with the first dew, a sense of chill and repulsion came over him. Baird had most of the conversation, and sustained it in such a manner that every now and then Sally found it necessary to explain that he wasn't so bad as you'd think. "He's taken to journalism since he kicked over his stool in the Estate Duty Office, and writes wonderful articles on gipsies and tinkers for *Chambers'* and *The Tramp*—they're quite fit to be read, too, though you mightn't believe it."

"You're right," said Raphael icily. He felt obliged to commit himself to a rebuke. Since they had left Isle of Thorns the mantle of Andy Baird's odiousness had fallen on

Sally. Her evident familiarity with this bounder had made her slide a dozen rungs down the ladder of his estimation—she was forward, fast, coarse-minded, and sorrow rose in his throat when he remembered how attractive he had found her for an hour.

There was no doubt about it. However much transient circumstances might deceive, there was to be no mating of sympathy between him and this moral street-urchin. He must slip back into his old life of conventionality and peace and retrospection—he must forget that sudden spring of youth at Isle of Thorns; he must remember that it was not right for women to smoke, and that no nice girl invited unknown men to tea, or wore fierily coloured stockings. But it grieved him, and he felt that Isle of Thorns and memory would never be the same—one would reproach and the other burden.

They had come to the clump of hazel and crack-willow where the track divides—on one side running to Vetchery and the Maresfield road, on the other, towards Chelwood Common. In front of them the Forest sloped down into the mists of the Weald, and high above the vapour, yet, as it seemed, below them in the south, hung the Great Wain, flashing its ageless mystery above the transient riddle of the fogs.

"Well, I hope I shall see some more of you," said Sally; "perhaps you'll come to the Show before it leaves, and shoot for a bag of peppermints. There's a first-class merry-go-round, too, and——"

"I'm sorry," said Raphael sadly, "but I hate Chelwood Common."

She looked at him uneasily for a moment, and Baird guffawed.

"I'm sorry too, then. I'm sorry you won't come, and I'm sorry you won't understand."

"I can't understand."

"Then good-bye."

She held out her hand, and for the second time they parted for ever.

CHAPTER IV

ANDY SINGS OUT OF TUNE

"THAT was your fault entirely," said Sally, biting her lip as she turned away.

"What was my fault?"

"That I shocked that nice man."

"And you mean to say you never shocked him before I came on the scenes?"

"Of course I don't—but you've made matters a hundred times worse. Why, I've been telling him there's no connexion between us, and then you go and talk of being 'with' me."

"Well, if I'm not with you, I should like to know where I am."

"You're with me in the sense that Old Stanger, and Joe, and Emanuel Horsley and the others are with me—that's all."

"That's all," assented Andy, putting his arm round her waist.

"Look here, I don't want any of that to-night," and she tried to wiggle away.

"But it's an uncommon fine evening for it—a full moon and a blasted heath."

"I dare say, but I'm not in the mood. Besides, I hate you; you're so fat."

Andy possessed himself of her hand.

"Let go."

He didn't.

"Look here . . ." and her voice was a little tremulous,

"I only allowed you to do this sort of thing because you told me you were safe."

"Yes, and I told you I was all the safer because I knew how not to be safe sometimes."

"Don't be an idot," said Sally with a nervous laugh.

He took her other hand, the hand nearest him, then suddenly bent sideways and kissed her.

"Don't, Andy—I've really had enough for to-night."

She looked round her at the bare, lone stretches of the Forest, blotched with pines and the shadow of pines. Not a soul was in sight, not a window gleam, only the stars in their mocking constellations.

She struggled faintly, not daring to rouse him by putting forth all her strength. He held her without apparent effort; her hands seemed to sink into his large soft ones, and his bosom against hers was like a wall.

Suddenly he stooped again and kissed her ear, then her cheek, then her neck, kissed her repeatedly in the angle of her chin as she strained from him and struggled, this time with all her strength.

At last she screamed, and the shrill, cold sound, ringing out over the Forest, seemed to bring them both to their senses; she ceased to struggle, and he let her go.

Sally burst into tears.

"Look here, Sal, don't be an idiot—I haven't hurt you."

"Oh, you brute!" sobbed the girl.

"I've often kissed you before."

"But never like that—never like that."

"Well, I'm sorry—do stop crying—I promise, I swear, not to do it again."

Still sobbing, and shuddering in every limb, she walked with him to the road. He began to talk to her about an article he was writing on gipsy funeral customs for the *Westminster Review,* and gradually she became quieter, and gave him a word or two, and at length a feeble laugh. When they came to Chelwood Common they shook hands, and he said "So long, old girl." But their eyes did not meet.

Stanger's World-Famous Show generally did a good business on Saturday night, and Sally had to push her way through something of a crowd to reach Mrs. Joe's caravan. The merry-go-round was laden—there was an individuality about it, for it sported not only horses and cars, but a dozen long-necked birds like ostriches, which pranced grotesquely up and down to the accompaniment of squalls and "If I planted a tiny seed of love," played at gallop pace by the machine-organ.

Old Stanger himself had charge of the merry-go-round. He was a short, pasty-faced young man, with a heavy, almost stupid expression. He owed his title to his position as boss of the show, in succession to his father, Old Stanger the first, who had died at Wadhurst two years ago. Close by was the Shooting Gallery, where Andy Baird had just joined a young gipsy, Ryley Carew, who had condescended to take charge during his absence of the "gaujo yak engroes," a row of larking farm-hands who ran little chance of impoverishing the peppermint stock. To the left of the Shooting Gallery was the brilliantly lighted tent where Madame Rotunda, the fat lady, was on view, a young man in a rusty frock-coat and top hat encouraging visitors outside, and a hand-organ playing "The Lost Chord" within.

Quite near was the Cocoanut Shie, genially ruled by Joe the nigger. Mrs. Joe was helping him to-night, having temporarily abandoned her fortune-telling pitch to her cousin, Savaina Carew.

"Your supper's in the cart, Miss," she called cheerily to Sally, "keeping hot on the stove."

Sally boarded with Mrs. Joe at sixpence a day, a sum which worked out at a sound profit for the latter, who allowed a halfpenny a head per meal. Her caravan was at the back of the shie, in shadow and comparative quiet. A small fire was burning before it, and on the steps sat two figures, who on approach proved to be Mrs. Stanger and Emanuel Horsley. Emanuel conducted a more or less open evasion of the Lotteries Act, but was at present snatching

an interval for supper and flirtation, judging by the smell rising from the fire, and his arm round Nellie Stanger's waist. He was a passionate adorer of that lady, who, however, had several others, and a reputation for fickleness. There were two Mrs. Stangers, the stationary and the itinerant. Nellie had been the itinerant for years, and showed no jealousy of her rival, snugly ensconced in a cottage at Portsmouth. But she was consumed by a mania for sweet things, literal and metaphorical, and when not eating bread and treacle, barley sugar, or those delicacies known to the initiated as Nelson slices, she was generally to be found with one or other of her admirers, preferably—at least since Sally had known her—Emanuel Horsley, whose command of language, acquired in the cheap-jack trade, was greatly at his service.

They took little notice of Sally as she brushed past them and stumbled into the darkness of the caravan. The Joes—they had no other name—were only half-and-halfs, or they would not have had a caravan, the thoroughbred gipsy being still faithful to the tent and tilt-cart of his forefathers. Mrs. Joe was the daughter of a genuine Ripley, who, however, had taken to "gaujo" life in Lewes, where he owned a large amount of house property. Mrs. Joe never failed to emphasize the fact that she might have married some one "unaccountable high up in the market-garden world," but she had preferred the nigger, who had come over with an American company in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* and being cast adrift early in the tour, had pitched a cocoanut shie on the green before her father's house. Her family had disowned her for the marriage, but she was exceedingly happy. She had five children in varying shades of black and brown, and her husband was good to her, though he beat her sometimes. He had beaten her that day, as Sally could tell by the supper, a succulent stew of cauliflower and rice. Joe never apologized but in kind, and every time circumstances forced him to give his wife a hiding, he would go to the nearest town, and buy (at least, so the charitable hoped) some dainty,

such as a pullet or a cauliflower, which had the double advantage of filling his stomach as well as touching her heart.

Sally was not hungry, and had soon finished her meal. Her hands shook as she fetched her bundle from the corner, and hauled it out of the caravan. Nellie and Emanuel still sat on the steps, eating a kipper with the same fork. Sally pitied them. Poor fools! they did not know what such things led to.

She did, and her shoulders were bowed with the knowledge as she walked away from the Show. Matters had come to a head; she felt like a man who runs contentedly along a narrow path, thinking it will go on for ever, and then suddenly finds that it ends in a broken bridge.

At the edge of Chelwood Common, about a hundred yards from the Show, stood a disused barn, with that mumpers' luxury, a dry floor. Sally's night-haunts had deteriorated. At first it had been "bed in the bush with stars to see," till she realized that one saw worms as well as stars, then she had found what she considered an ideal refuge at Isle of Thorns, but the next night her spirits had failed her on account of its loneliness. The big barn on Chelwood Common had been a luxury yesterday, but this evening she shuddered at it. Its mouldy beams, broken walls, and doorless archway struck her cold. She set down her bundle on the earthen floor, and asked herself "Whither?"

Where indeed? Her plans seemed to have come abruptly to an end, and her future to have closed in upon her like a wall. She realized that the life she was living must be changed, yet how could she change it? She counted over her money—eleven shillings and fourpence. It was all she had in the world. She could not go back to London, and she could not stay where she was. What could she do?

"Oh, you brute!—Andy you brute!" she moaned. Yet she had not been entirely surprised at his conduct. There had always been a spice of danger—just enough to entice—in their relationship, separating it from the cleanliness as well as the banality of ordinary lovemaking. Ugh! She was

foul. A wave of self-loathing swept over her, making her hide her eyes; and in the darkness of the hollow of her hands she saw a man's face, not Andy's, but the face of the man who had blushed when she swore, who had asked her permission to smoke, though she herself was smoking, who had replied with drawing-room courtesy to her cheeky scrawl of a note. She remembered him clearly—his skin was olive, and his smile was white and slow. She knew nothing about him, not even where he lived; it had been just like her to talk about herself the whole time, to tell him of her life, her tastes, and her ambitions, and not care twopence about his. It was characteristic—a masculine trait, of which she had several.

Well, fate knew better than to let her life-lines join with his, she the vulgar female, he the gentle dreamer. Many a girl would have welcomed him as a friend, but he was not her style. The style for her was the young man with wild hair, low collars, and sloppy suits, who sprawled in his thousands in the flats of Earl's Court and Chelsea girls; that was all she was worthy of—the literary bounder. And now she had put herself out of reach even of him. Her flat was gone, her furniture sold, she had quarreled with Peg, with her publishers, she had only eleven and fourpence. She had burnt her boats.

It was after nine, and the Scorpion had risen, shining low and tremulous over the fields of Pollardstand. Tears gathered in Sally's eyes as she sat in the barn doorway and watched the stars. Their multitude, their purity, their everlastingness weighed her down, poor clod of earth, dust of the universe, thinking out her petty, time-fenced problems by their eternal light—without solving any, too; for as before, the only reply to "Whither?" was "Where indeed?"

For the last night or two she had been feeling very tired, and this night her head ached abominably. She longed for a pan of fresh water; it was all very well to talk of the cleanly freedom of the highways, but never in her whole life had she felt so dirty as during this last week. "Oh, for

a bath!" she moaned. "Oh, for a nightgown!" But neither was to be had, and Sally's toilet was perforce confined to her hair, taking off some and brushing the rest.

It was quite dark in the huge cavern of the barn, and Sally fished a candle out of her bundle, and a bottle for a candlestick. Then she knelt down. To-morrow was Sunday, and she had never failed to rise early on Sunday for the Communion. The chaos of the last three years had not kept her away; she had felt her need the more, and had turned with greater pleading to the one fixed star of her shaken firmament. To-night there was something almost physical in her longing to breathe other air than the reek of this world, bite other bread than the bread of its tears, drink a sweeter vintage than the wine of its poor pleasures, sharp and dregged.

But the anticipation was alloyed; there was something too physical about it, there was too little spiritual assent. She repeated one or two prayers, sweet-worded translations of the holinesses of some Latin saint. Then her hands dropped, and she fell on her face. . . .

"O Faithful and True! . . . O Faithful and True! . . . Save me! Save me! Save me!"

The cry of her great loneliness echoed in every chink of the old barn, but she took no heed. She lay quivering and sobbing till the vehemence of her own grief frightened her and she grew suddenly still. For a quarter of an hour she was motionless, like one dead on the earthen floor; then she put out her arm, and pulled two things out of her bundle —an old rug which she wrapped round her without rising, and a picture which she laid under her cheek.

Then came the nightly struggle for sleep. Unused to a night in the open, every sound disturbed her and perplexed her with its origin—rustlings, sighings, patterings, groanings. She felt she ought to blow out the candle for fear it should attract aliens, but was too frightened of the dark. Its flickerings and faint light to her closed eyes comforted her, but she knew it was a dangerous luxury. She could

still hear the music of the Show in the distance, very faintly, except when a puff of wind made it clearer, and brought with it a shout. Suppose some drunken merrymaker should stumble her way and see her light! She nearly wept with fear and shame. What a fool she was! more nervous than on her first night out of doors. At last she grew desperate; she would blow out the candle. But first of all she took the picture from under her cheek and gazed at it. It was Watts's "Rider on the White Horse," and as she looked at the strong arm and burning forehead comfort came; she stretched out her neck, puffed at the candle, and fell back with closed eyes.

She opened them from time to time as the hours wore on, and saw the old barn pale with starlight, and a star behind every chink. She seemed to have intervals of unconsciousness, but she did not remember falling asleep, and her position never changed. The music had ceased without her noticing the precise moment, and the wind began to moan across the common towards her. She prayed for sleep, if only for an hour; this sleeplessness was wearing her out, and the wind and darkness terrified her. Then came a broad, sunny vision of a friend's flat in Chelsea, a kettle singing on the hob, a window looking out to the Thames—then came a sense of suffocation and a hand on her throat. She started up panting, with dilated pupils; the daylight, pure and pearly, in the barn, and the picture of Faithful and True was crumpled under her thigh.

She wondered how long she had slept; not very long, for she felt heavy and unrefreshed, and her head ached worse than ever. She had never had such a Sacrament morning. The nearest approach to it had been last Sunday, when she had left the Blackcock Inn and the snoring Peg for the cool aisles of Cowden Church. It was half-past six, and, getting up, she made herself as tidy as she could. Later in the day she would ask Mrs. Joe to let her have a basin of water. It was about half an hour's walk to the church at Dane Hill, but Sally set out at seven; it would be better to wait in the church than in the barn.

The sky was covered with light grey clouds, and the wind had drifted to the west. Ashdown Forest seemed to have slipped back into winter—the mists hung over it as over a Scotch moor, and its tones were bleak and pale. She crossed Chelwood Common, avoiding the Show, and joined the road near the Herringdales. Dane Hill was a rising village, and several villas of vivid brick surrounded the new grey church. Sally slipped in; it was empty.

She knelt for a quarter of an hour in a pew at the back, shivering and unrecollected, half-asleep. One by one the congregation pattered in, mostly respectable people from the villas. The church was "High," and a little server with about six inches of trousers showing under his scarlet cassock lit the candles on the altar. Sally wished the clergyman would come, for she felt faint and giddy, and wondered if she could last out the service without food. She had meant to ask counsel and direction, but her brain was like lead, and she could only kneel and shiver.

She heard a movement, and lifted her face. The priest had come in, and the congregation gave an approving shuffle. But she did not drop her eyes, they remained fixed on some one between her and the altar—a man in a green suit. The carriage of the shoulder, the poise of the head convinced her, and to make assurance doubly sure, he half turned his face, and showed her his olive skin, flushed in the light that streamed through the crimson wing of an angel in the window at his side.

A small boy was in his pew, and showed signs of belonging to him, though they knelt far apart. Was it his son? he did not look old enough to have a son of that age, but a dozen resemblances proclaimed relationship—perhaps it was a brother. She wondered how old he was, about thirty, she should say. Had he seen her? She thought not, for she crouched in the corner of a dark seat.

" . . . Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law."

She found her lips mumbling the words, without the

slightest idea which commandment they referred to. She must pull herself together.

He was evidently very High Church, for he genuflected at the Incarnatus and crossed himself at the end of the Creed. She herself, inconsistently, was not ritualistic. She stood with a high chin, in an almost careless attitude, but she loved to watch his dark head bow. "He is as courtly to his God as he is to me," and straightway a new misery swept over her, the sense of his worthiness to receive as compared with hers. She imagined his pure prayers, his clean heart. Her own heart was beating violently, tearing at her bosom. She was not well. Suppose she should faint . . . and he should hear her fall. He must not see her while Baird's kisses were still unwashed from her face . . . now she remembered that Baird's salvation was to have been the special intention of this Eucharist. But she could not stay . . . she felt ill . . . dying . . . She must get a breath of fresh air.

Somehow she managed to stagger to her feet and creep out of her pew . . . only a few steps more and the blessed wind was on her forehead. He did not see her, he was busy with his prayers. . . .

CHAPTER V

IN A CARAVAN

She sat for ten minutes in the field next the churchyard, her back against an oak. Then her faintness passed off, but she was not really better, her head felt big and heavy, and though she was faint for food, the thought of eating made her sick. She dragged herself up, and walked towards Chelwood Common. She hoped she was not going to be ill. What would become of her then? She could not travel with the Show, and nobody could stay behind to look after her. She would have to go to the Workhouse Infirmary, that was all.

There was an unfamiliar look about the booths and caravans in the peace of their Sunday sleep. It was nearly nine o'clock, but no one seemed awake, and a footstep behind her made her start. She turned round and saw Andy.

"Good-morning," he said; "have you had your breakfast?"

"I'm going to see if Mrs. Joe's got it ready."

"She's not wakened yet—no one's awake but me. Will you be having breakfast with me?"

"No, thank you. I'll wait till the Joes are up."

"Look here, Sally—we're still pals, aren't we?"

"Yes . . . of course."

"Well, it doesn't seem like it. Do come along, and have a cup of tea. You look quite ill."

The desire for food had suddenly become overpowering; besides, it was broad daylight, and there were people all around her—she never felt afraid of Andy by day or in a crowd.

She followed him to his tent, close to the shooting gal-

lery, and sat down on the turf while he brought out cups and plates, and set the kettle on his gipsy brazier. Baird's quarters did not savour much of the gentleman tramp—his tent might have been a Romany's in its low-roofed stuffiness, and inside it was a confusion of clothes, crockery and bedding. Andy's mother had kept the sweet-stall in MacFarlane's Caledonian Fair; and though his father, an Edinburgh grocer, had given him a good education and every chance of rising above his surroundings, heredity had never lost its grip. The vagabond strain soon flung him off his clerk's stool into the hedgerow, while the tradesman taught him to combine his vagrancy with a pretty bit of business in the rifle and revolver line. All his education could do was to make him fortify in himself some remains of culture by contributing the records of the highway to the journals he had written for occasionally in his wage earning years. He had a fair reputation as a writer on gipsy life and customs, and Sally was sometimes inclined to think that the journalistic outlook coloured both the tradesman and the vagabond. Of the three strains she found it the least congenial, though in many ways it was their point of contact.

When he had cooked the sausage she could not eat it, but she drank quantities of tea. He was evidently anxious about her, and she was touched by his solicitude. When the meal was over, she let herself lean against his shoulder—she could not hold up her head.

She had very little idea of how the morning passed. His arm was round her, but he was too pitiful of her illness to take advantage of it. His shoulder was very comfortable, and memory was too dead to trouble her with its warnings. But strange to say, though he held her close, she did not think of him at all, but of Moore. The novelist's sense of fitness made her glad that her last glimpse of him had been in church, even though it had emphasized the distance between them—he kneeling at his Communion, she creeping out into the cold young day. She wondered where he was now, she tried to picture his home life. Was he well off?

His clothes were nice, and he had told her this much about himself, that he was secretary to Professor Wetherill at Legsheath. Were secretaries well off? She had a feeling that Moore, at any rate, must be so; and he was married, she now felt convinced of that, and the boy she had seen with him was his son, and his wife wore soft silken gowns, and played to him in the evenings, and was called Kitty.

. . .

The activity of her brain had the effect of rousing her body, and at about twelve o'clock she and Andy went over to the barn and fetched her bundle. She had made up her mind to spend the night in the caravan, though she felt much better than at breakfast time. The mysterious part of her illness was its fluctuations from better to worse—in the afternoon she was bad again, shivering on the caravan steps, and at six o'clock Mrs. Joe made her as comfortable as might be on a mattress just inside the door.

This was the beginning of the end, she felt, but she would not let herself think of the future. The sunset was grotesque behind the merry-go-round, and the shadows of the wooden horses came to lie on her bed. The Show was wrapped in an incongruous stillness; it made Sally think of the ghost of a bygone fair, spectral booths rising out of the mist on some lonely common of a winter's night. Now and then from the distance would come sounds of horse-play, and occasionally a fiddle from the gipsies' tent. Then the wind puffed her far-off church bells, mocking her with her Sabbath missed, and she pictured the respectable people from the villas trooping once again into church, the lights twinkling on the altar, and Moore kneeling in the front pew with his wife and child. The sunset faded, the bells ceased, and Sally slept.

When she woke, it was night, and somebody had just tumbled over her legs. The Joes were going to bed, and a good many more than the Joes. A candle burned in a bottle-neck, showing her a Rembrandtesque display of arms and legs and stalwart chests. The caravan seemed full—

Sally had had no idea that she was not to be the only lodger. A black-browed youth who helped at the Houp-là stall was "shaking down" in front of the stove, over which his father was cooking a bloater. Gertie Madden, the gingerbread girl, was helping Mrs. Joe wash the children, and the nigger was streched full length on his mattress, smoking a pipe and spitting at the ceiling.

"I've kept half a red herring for you, Miss," said Mrs. Joe cheerily, as she rolled up a naked child in a flannel petticoat, and laid it in the crook of its father's arm.

"No, thank you," moaned Sally; "I'd rather have the window open."

"It won't open, Miss—ain't made to."

"Then the door——"

"That wouldn't be safe—there's always some one prowling about, and we'd catch our deaths of cold. No wonder you're poorly, Miss, if you likes to sleep in a draught."

Sally relapsed into silence; she felt too ill to protest, but she was soon stirred once more into horror.

"I can't stay here, Mrs. Joe; there are animals on the ceiling."

The negro's wife showed signs of losing her temper.

"And where would you have 'em, I'd like to know? They're better on the ceiling than anywhere else."

"They drops down sometimes," said the Houp-là youth, killing something on the mattress.

"I'll lend her my umbrella," said the gingerbread girl; "the young lady ain't used to bugs, I reckon."

A sturdy gamp, used to protect her wares of a rainy day, was accordingly spread over Sally, with the reminder that she wasn't in Buckingham Paliss. A few minutes later the light was put out, and the various occupants of the caravan "shook down" with marvellous compactness. No one spoke for about half an hour, when somebody complained of the draught, but on Joe explaining that any air there might be was due to some fault in the structure, not to any neglect in

closing every possible means of ventilation, the complainer collapsed into grunts, and at last into silence.

The hours wore on, and Sally's eyes were wide open, staring into the blackness. Strange to say, she did not feel hot, but half-choked and restless. For the first part of the night the stillness was intense, broken only by the occasional drop of a bug from the ceiling to the umbrella. Towards morning the Houp-là boy began to talk in his sleep, and had to be kicked by his father. Then Sally found herself talking too. She had no intention of saying anything, but every now and then she found a phrase, a sentence, on her lips, generally quite unconnected with her thoughts. These, strangely enough, were humorous. She could not help laughing when she thought of what Peg or her publishers would say if they could see her—the trim, tailor-made Sally of Coleherne Studios, lying in a filthy caravan under an umbrella, in a welter of tramps and children and vermin.

She became very thirsty, and asked for water, but no one took any notice, and she was wondering why, when she realized that the words on her lips were: "Are you going to Isle of Thorns this morning?" This frightened her, and she dared not speak again, though every now and then a muttered "Mysterium Magnum . . . Mysterium Magnum," woke her out of the doze into which she was falling.

At last she slept, and wandered in her dreams about the Forest. A fire was burning at Isle of Thorns, and she went in to warm her hands; then she saw Mr. Moore kneeling beside her, and he took her hands and laid them in his bosom. She woke up with a little surprised laugh, and looked round her. It was broad daylight, and some one was holding her hands—Andy Baird.

"Sally, I've brought you some milk to your breakfast."

"You mustn't kiss me," she said.

"I won't if you'd rather not"; and somebody giggled at the back of the van.

"It's exceedingly kind of you," continued Sally, thinking

she had said "thank you"—"Mr. Moore's wife's name is Kitty."

She realized that she was not saying what she intended, and a shade of anguished perplexity came into her eyes.

She heard them talking about a doctor, and hope sprang up in her heart. She associated a doctor with cool capable hands, a kind voice, and a reassuring smile. It would be good to have those. Andy had fetched her the milk from Orz Nash Farm that morning, and she wished she could thank him properly, but she dared not make another attempt.

More haze . . . then "Be so good as to put out your tongue, Meddem."

Sally opened her eyes, and saw a little man with a ragged moustache and a greasy frock-coat.

"It's Dr. Drinkwater," said Mrs. Joe. "Old Stanger told me he was over at Lambpool, so, says I, the very thing for Miss Odiarne."

Sally stared at the grimy little quack.

"I economize in soap," she said.

"Well, I won't deny, Meddem, as you wouldn't be all the better for a wash, but this ain't the time for it now. You look feverish, Meddem—be so kind as to put out your tongue."

Sally obeyed. She hoped that Dr. Drinkwater—whose breath belied his name—would not touch her; but he felt her pulse, and insisted on sounding her chest with a weird instrument which she suspected of being broken.

"Just as I thought, Meddem, just as I thought. My diagnosis never fails, and my terms is cash."

Mrs. Joe evidently knew where Sally kept her money, for she soon saw the doctor bite a florin and produce what was apparently an old lemonade bottle, filled with a suspicious-looking substance.

"Meddem, I will prescribe you my celebrated Pink Powder, patronized by the nobility and gentry, with every bottle of which I give away a free sample of my Lightning Gripe Cure. And now, Meddems and gents"—turning from

Sally to the other occupants of the caravan—"what can I do for you? Mr. Harman, may I recommend my . . ."

The conversation faded into a mist of meaningless sound, out of which gradually rose the strains of "If I planted a tiny seed of love." The merry-go-round had started work, and Sally roused up at the din. Monday was not properly a fair day, but it was the last day of Stanger's Show on Chelwood Common, and was being celebrated accordingly. The school-children were having their Easter holidays, and their shouts soon reached her from the Cocoanut Shie. Then came the crack of rifles from the Thistle Shooting Gallery. But above all rose the music of the roundabout, playing its one tune, which experience told her would not cease till eleven o'clock that night.

"If I planted a tiny seed of love
In the garden of your heart,
Would it grow into a great big tree some day?
Or would it wither and fade away?"

She could tell when the machine was slow because the tune was played at funeral pace, and when the prancing horses and ostriches were at their highest and fastest because the song then became a gallop, and she found it difficult to fit the words in. The rhyming annoyed her—why was there nothing to rhyme with "heart"? Then the scansion of the lines began to worry her, and she found herself trying to divide them up into feet. "The metre of English verse depends on the accent rather than on the division"—but the accent seemed to come on the "if"—"*If* I planted a tiny seed of love," and the rest of the line rushed after it without a pause. Was she very ill indeed, she wondered, or was she drunk? There was always "something" in Mrs. Joe's tea, and probably, not being accustomed to drink, it had affected her system. The words, "If I planted a tiny seed of love," seemed to be written on a great blank wall, and she was hurling herself at them from every point of the compass. Sometimes the letters would scatter themselves

about the caravan, and she would grope after them, crying, and all the time the music grew louder and louder, as if it would burst her ears.

She found herself singing, trying to drown it, but it grew louder and louder still. Would it never stop? She seemed to see two men fighting, they were hitting each other furiously, and every now and then they closed and wrestled. After a time she recognized one of them as Moore, and she felt that if only she could drown the music he would have the victory. She sang louder and louder, till her voice was like the wind bellowing in her ears. She saw his white face strain, and sang louder, still louder, to drown that damned music.

"*If* I planted a tiny seed of love . . ." something seemed suddenly to break—music and song had ceased, and Mr. Moore was kneeling beside her, lifting her head.

"I've saved you," she panted. "I've saved you." Then the darkness and the silence came.

CHAPTER VI

IN A HOSPITAL

To Raphael Moore that day had been a miracle. He finished it in the garden at Towncreep, where the high walls seemed to shut out all the hurricane and adventure of the past hours, and to brick him safely into the normal.

The day before had ended uncertainly. It had begun well, with a six o'clock rising and a tramp across the Forest with Neddy to Dane Hill. But something had spoiled his Mass—he could not exactly tell what, a sudden influx of one of those new inexplicable emotions which had lately begun to trouble him. To a man accustomed to read his heart as easily and peacefully as he reads the Gospel, the first hints of the mystery within him are terrible as a storm with falling stars. Strange tides of thought, gusts of unexplained joy and sorrow, troubled Raphael's quiet deeps, just when the Spirit of God had begun to move on the face of the waters. He had been inattentive, restless, disturbed—even Neddy noticed a difference in the cold father at his side. When Raphael came back to him from the altar, his eyes had not that look which the child used weekly to watch for, and his hands were twisting each other on his breast.

It was Neddy who brought matters to a crisis. This was the last week of his Easter holidays—he went to a small day-school at Maresfield—and to-morrow was the last day of the fair on Chelwood Common. Would his father take him to it, and let him ride on the merry-go-round? It was some time before he ventured the request, for he was not used to asking favours of that being who moved in a world apart, and in whose thoughts his childish instinct told him he had very little share.

Raphael refused him gently—without giving a reason, which Neddy did not expect. The father in his own childhood had had to accept his prohibitions without any ballast in the shape of explanation, and now his son must do the same. However, another side of the question was that he had no reason to give.

He longed to go to Chelwood Common, to make one more attempt upon that stubborn child. He feared that he had not done enough, but he also feared that he had done too much. Terrified of making himself a nuisance, of ill-bred interference and impertinent meddling, he was also terrified lest he should shirk his responsibilities, and blasphemously deny his position as his brother's keeper. It was a struggle between these two terrors, and the end of it all was that after the rest of the house was in bed, he went into Neddy's room, woke him up, and told him a lie.

"I've been thinking over Chelwood Common, and I've come to the conclusion that it isn't likely to be very rowdy at about five o'clock, so if you'll meet me at Allfornought to-morrow evening, I'll take you there for an hour or two."

Neddy thanked him, with a rapturous gratitude that touched his father's heart, and nothing of any importance happened till the next day at five o'clock, except that Raphael found a violet at Isle of Thorns.

Then events, the abnormal and catastrophic, had crowded on one another thick and fast. He had gone with Neddy to the merry-go-round, and had wondered why he did not see Miss Odiarne. He had left his son on a spotted horse, and had gone to look for her. He had heard her singing, and had found her, a dishevelled feverish mass, on the caravan floor. He had called for help, and had sent for his own doctor, watching by her till he came. The doctor had ordered her removal, and she had been taken in his car to Maresfield cottage-hospital.

Then Andy Baird asserted himself; he had been at the Dane Hill public-house at the time of the doctor's visit, but, hearing the news on his return, at once set out for Mares-

field. He was contrite at having left Sally so much alone that day, and he insisted on paying her expenses. Raphael withstood him, in spite of visions of a foregone Burberry and other sartorial economies, but Baird carried the day, and also insisted that he should be kept informed of Sally's condition. Stanger Show was leaving the next morning, but he gave Moore the names of several post-offices which would "find him" in the course of his wanderings. The two men shook hands when they parted, and Raphael suddenly remembered Neddy, whom he found in due time, a contented if rather seasick Casabianca, with about half a crown owing to the spotted horse.

Thus the day ended—Sally in bed at the cottage-hospital, with the doctors talking of typhoid fever; Neddy in bed at Towncreep Farm, dead sick but of jubilant memory; Baird shooting his cares into the mouth of a cardboard Harry Lauder at the Thistle Revolver Range; Raphael sitting in the Towncreep garden, safely bricked up again in the normal.

He told no one at Towncreep of his adventure, except Eliza Huggett. He did not care to have his conduct tinselled into knight-errantry, and he did not want Sally's circumstances to be discussed as minutely outside the hospital as her symptoms were within. Both—circumstances and symptoms—were disquieting enough. The latter pointed to typhoid fever, the former to a catastrophe. Baird had promised to write to her friend, Peg Wales, but there was evidently not much to be hoped from that quarter, for all that Andy's information with regard to Miss Wales amounted to was that she owed everybody five pounds. In course of time an answer arrived—Peg was hideously sorry for her friend's misfortune. Could she do anything? She hadn't a red cent, and she didn't know of any one who could come to Sally's rescue when she left the hospital. Her relations were all dead and her friends stony-broke. Tell Sal to write another book.

Meantime, Sal lay with closed eyes, floating through seas of grey, floating from one grey cloud to another, conscious

of nothing else. Matters must wait till she recovered—if she ever did.

For some time there were doubts of this, and Raphael, calling every evening for news, was sent away with a long face. But though by no means robust, there was a certain soundness and cleanliness in her constitution which fought through her illness, and landed her safe on the other side.

The grey cloud lifted, and she became conscious of her surroundings. She asked questions which were answered, suggested doubts which were soothed. There was nothing to trouble her peace—past, present and future were in air-tight compartments, and neither the first nor the last could trouble her as she lay in the white stillness of the second.

She knew that some day she would have to think of the future, and ask certain questions about the past, but these considerations did not disturb her now. One evening she was given some flowers, and, asking who had sent them, was told "Mr. Moore."—"How sweet of him," murmured Sally, sniffing at the bunch which told her that Summer was in a farmhouse garden. "I should like to write and thank him."

If only she had known what the letter would involve she would have contented herself with a message. The nurse wrote it for her—none the less the mischief was done. The letter woke her up, smashed the air-tight compartments, scattered all her white peace.

She knew that the doctor thought her nearly well enough to leave the hospital, and she asked herself blankly—where could she go? She had only nine and fourpence, out of which she owed Mrs. Joe three shillings. Then it occurred to her that there would be expenses in connexion with the cottage-hospital, which was not a purely charitable institution—being more in the nature of a nursing-home than a hospital. A week ago she would have been able to put this question out of her mind, but the letter had ended all such simple dealing. It had forced her back into her old state of fret and conjecture. Moore took his old place of paramount absorption, and every problem became connected with

him. She wondered if he was paying for her, and hated the idea. She admired him, and was touched by him, but she did not like him. He was a type she had never met before, and almost every twist in her nature found its contrast in his.

At last she decided to speak to him, and asked the nurse if he might come up to her room next time he called. Accordingly Raphael appeared early on a June evening, and found Sally sitting up in bed. She held out her hand, and each took a long look at the other. He found her much changed, with her features sharpened by illness, and the sunburn gone from her skin; she found him the same as before, slim, almost boyish-looking in his grey flannel suit, but with odd, unyouthful eyes. His mouth was good and sweet-tempered, and when she looked at it she came to the conclusion that, after all, she liked him; and when she saw that he carried a little basket of strawberries with the peculiarly masculine combination of carefullness and awkwardness, she liked him still more.

She was, however, immensely relieved when he told her, in answer to her question, that Baird was paying her expenses. Though he had insulted her, though she dreaded him, it was a fact that she would rather accept a favour from Baird than from Moore, whom she respected and who had always treated her with chivalrous simplicity. It was part of the Mysterium Magnum—she immediately flung her anxieties into the future—"she would pay back Andy some day; meantime, it was very good of him"—and began to talk to Raphael with a sudden gush of ease and frankness.

The only awkward thing was her inability to remember how much of her knowledge of his life was due to her imagination. She was apprised of this drawback by her first question, "How is Mrs. Moore?" with his answer, "My wife has been dead six years." Having failed so signally with Kitty, she did not dare mention the son, unsure whether he too was born of dreams, but Raphael of his own accord spoke of him. Sally, sitting there in her whiteness, was a far stronger allure to confidence than in the days of her

health and tan. She reminded him of Margaret, with her pale skin and far-off eyes, and as she was too uncertain of her memory to speak, there was nothing to dispel the illusion. So he told her about Neddy and Towncreep Farm and his work and Professor Wetherill. She saw he was beginning to slide off to the Elizabethans and strove to keep him on the personal note; but Raphael already regretted having said so much about himself, and all he would leave the Elizabethans for was the discussion of her future.

To both of them it was baffling—here was Sally, still weak, demanding expensive care, yet without money and without friends except Baird, whom both avoided mentioning. Raphael suggested that she should write to her publishers for an advance, but Sally spurned the idea. She had quarrelled fierily with them over *Ginger's* wretched sales, and as for advancing her anything, they were fifty or sixty pounds out of pocket by her already. He told her of Peg's letter, and she was not surprised Peg had indeed buried the hatchet, but she was one of those people who never bury a hatchet without erecting a tombstone; and what she had said about her finances was quite true—why, she owed Sally herself five pounds. Besides, she was resolved not to go back to London, not for years at least. She would never write another book in London; if she did it would be a failure like *Ginger*. She was going to stay out in the country, in the free air, under the hedges if necessary. Raphael was surprised at this—his theory was that when a certain line of conduct brought one what is called "a good lesson," one quickly abandoned it as an evil way. But Sally was brighter at disentangling cause and effect, and used her illness as an argument in favour of her villainies. She put down to its approach the distaste and timidity which had spoiled her first week's hedging and ditching—things would be quite different when she was well.

This disquieted Raphael considerably. Sally must not only be provided for but restrained. Of course Baird would encourage a return to the highway—he must not hear of

her tomfool wishes. However, the chief puzzle was her immediate future; if that could be secured the remoter chances might be less catastrophic. The doctor had told him that she would have to leave the hospital next week; her bed was wanted, and she was on a fair way to recovery, needing only care and some cockering for a bit. Where could she go? It was a long walk from Maresfield to Towncreep, but Raphael thought of Sally all the way.

He had nearly reached home when an idea came to him, smacking of desperation. Why should she not find shelter at Towncreep? Eliza Huggett had two or three rooms to let, and some skill in nursing. She had helped to drag her husband through one or two crises which every one but herself had hoped for her sake would be fatal, and every day she practised on him the care Sally would require—watchfulness, helpfulness, humouring, dieting.

Raphael blushed at his own boldness, none the less he gave the plan consideration. A month or two at Towncreep was just what Sally needed—she would be happy, well looked after, and the cost would be small. Her story had already leaked out sufficiently to make all further efforts at secrecy undesirable. The idea was without obstacle, except his own timidity—the farm was a boarding-house, free to any one who could pay for it, her presence need rouse no comment. What was more natural than that after her illness she should come there for convalescence?

Accordingly he made the suggestion to Eliza, and found that it pleased her. Her husband had been in too good health of late to satisfy her instincts—she would be glad to wait on the young lady whose story struck her as pathetic. Miss Odiarne could have the west bedroom in the wing, quite near her own.

The next evening Moore, strangely eager for her answer, asked Sally if she approved of his plan. For a moment her face clouded.

Oh, yes . . . she was sure to like Towncreep . . . there was nowhere else to go.

"I'm sure you will like it," said Raphael gravely.

The agonized pucker was between her brows, and he knew that something was troubling her.

"Mr. Baird will pay for me, won't he?" she asked suddenly.

"Do you really wish——"

"Oh, yes, we're such old friends, you know—I should love to go to Towncreep—what a good idea! It will be splendid," and he was pained and perplexed to see the pucker vanish from her face.

CHAPTER VII

IN A GARDEN

So Sally arrived at Towncreep Farm, and created very little flutter at first. All the excitement Mrs. Huggett's boarders had to waste had already been thrown away on the news that Mr. Moore had found a poor girl dying in a gipsy caravan, and had taken her to the cottage-hospital, and that the girl wasn't really a gipsy at all, but a novelist, who had written a book which Mr. Harris remembered having seen held up to the horror of pious Christians in his Church paper.

She was not well enough to mix much with her fellows. Her recovery in hospital had been rapid, but seemed to drag a little now. She spent most of her time in her room or in Eliza Huggett's parlour, consequently she saw little enough of Mr. Griggs, the French-gardening pupil, Mr. Harris, the lay-reader, Mrs. Ewland, the distressed gentlewoman, or the two elementary school-teachers, the Misses Annie and Cecily Evans, known to the profane as Sister and Sissy.

Raphael himself did not see much of her—he was off to his work before she was up, and it was only in the evening that he met her now and then. She had not been at Towncreep a fortnight when Baird's remittances ceased. Raphael said nothing, but took care that Mrs. Huggett should not be the loser. Sally asked no questions—she did not write to Baird, except for a note pencilled soon after her arrival in answer to one of his. If only the fellow would disappear!—then there might be some chance for Sally.

Towards the beginning of July there was some glorious

hot weather—throbbing sweeps of sky, saffroned at the rim, haze among the poplars of the low fields and the pines of the high Forest. In the evenings Sally sat out of doors, in a wicker chair in the walled garden, watching the haze grow pink, and the first stars trouble it above the gables. There Raphael once joined her, and after that it became a custom. After all, they had several points in common, and it was delightful to find these and dwell on them, even if occasionally they slid off. For some reason or other, Raphael always preferred Sally in the evenings—whether it was his or her feelings that were softened at that hour he could not tell. She certainly looked prettier in the twilight—no glare to expose the lines on her face, and a curious star dusk to etherealize her features. She had sent for her clothes to Peg—with whom she had warehoused them on leaving her flat, and who had unfortunately taken a commission of ties and handkerchiefs—and on these still evenings she would wear soft collarless blouses, revealing her throat, thin and white in the dusk of her cushions.

He often found himself thinking of her while he worked at Legsheath. Those evenings in the walled garden became as precious to him as the mornings at Isle of Thorns. Curiously enough, they were connected. His breakfast eaten in the smell of sweet decays was mysteriously linked with the moon above the garden wall, and the tobacco plant that he and Sally sniffed together. The same essence was in both, just as spring copies autumn's colours, and childhood borrows the innocence of old age.

He was not in love with Sally, there was never any thought of that, and he sometimes realized how much simpler the problem would have been if he loved her. He could have married her, hidden her from the rough obstreperous world in the peace of his farmhouse garden, where none but the moon looked over the wall. He was poor, but she was used to poverty, and however modest his pittance, it was more than she would have alone—alone she was penniless. But he did not love her, and his conscience was far too simple

to goad him into offering her marriage without love. Chivalry, pity, necessity could not make such a poor man's marriage bearable—love must be shut with them inside the garden, for none but the moon looked over the wall.

But he liked Sally, and was bound to confess that her conversation was, in itself, more interesting than Margaret's, even if it sometimes furiously expanded on subjects Margaret considered taboo. At first one or two of her remarks had petrified him, but now he had grown more understanding, and realized that he was face to face with a mind, not of extraordinary coarseness, but of extraordinary pudor. He had more than once put down her outspokenness to ignorance, but now he looked deeper, and saw that she was no more ignorant than she was foul. Her knowledge was amazing—how she had come by it, he, with his ignorance of certain conditions of life and feminism, could not guess—but it was absolutely non-corrosive, and she thought of certain subjects as simply and impersonally as she thought of the North Pole. In course of time he came to find this attitude curiously refreshing—it was like the Golden Age, when men were ashamed of nothing, and consequently had nothing to be ashamed of.

She grew stronger as the month wore on, and as her health improved she gave vent to a flood of high spirits that appalled the supper-table at Towncreep. Various events of her past, evidently not intended by the fates for circulation outside Peg's studio, made Sister and Sissy choke over their bacon. Every one looked at her askance, except Raphael and Neddy. The latter appealed to the child in her, to the uproarious tide of her returning health; she was a physical as well as a mental romp, and more than once had to be sternly rebuked by the doctor for premature ragging.

Thus July drifted dreaming into August. Both Sally and Raphael knew that their change must come, but neither cared to break the silences that were sometimes tender. Raphael felt that even with her future undecided he could be content, if he could only feel that Baird would not come

back into her life—with his doubtful jests to corrupt her candour, and his lure of the open road to tempt her into savagery. Sally never spoke of him, and it almost seemed as if she too hoped he would disappear. Moore had not heard from him for over a month, but one evening as he and Sally sat with a book in the swale of the new moon, Baird's face suddenly looked over the wall.

Stanger's Show was at East Grinstead, and the thought of Sally had snapped into Andy's head, from which certain events had banished it awhile. East Grinstead was six or seven miles from Towncreep, and from the Scotchman's indolent manner Raphael hoped that he would find the road too long. But Sally must have made herself unnecessarily attractive that first evening, for two days later he came again, and one evening in the next week Raphael returned from Legsheath to find himself supplanted by the side of the wicker chair.

August was not like July. There were golden days and silver dusks, Isle of Thorns in the morning and the garden at twilight, but the link between these last was broken. The evenings belonged to Andy Baird, lounging at Sally's feet; Raphael seemed to have no share in them—they had slipped suddenly and cruelly from under his hand.

He had begun to read *Arden of Faversham* with her, but soon after Baird's arrival the readings became desultory, and at last they ceased. The conversation for the most part hung round people and places he did not know; he could not join in, but he would not go away. If he went he knew that Baird's decoy-work would became more explicit. He had no doubt whatever that it was his object to entice her back to her wanderings. It had not been so from the first, perhaps, but he was working for it now. So Raphael clung to them with limpet-like tenacity, though he was well aware that Andy, at any rate, wished him away.

He knew, however, that Baird sometimes visited Sally while he was at Legsheath. She herself said nothing—her attitude was very different from the days when, like King

Charles's head, he crept into all her conversations—but Mrs. Huggett told him he was often there, and Moore could trace his passage over Sally's mind, like the track of a snail over a leaf.

He now realized that it was not that he had grown accustomed to her peculiarities, but that in the quiet of her illness and the orderliness of Towncreep, she had put them from her for a while. Were it not for Andy they might never have come back—now he jostled them every day. She once told him that her life shut her in, and he caught her in more than one jibe at his own decorum.

Baird never mentioned his debt, now fairly considerable, and sometimes Raphael's blood boiled to think that Sally could allow this man who had neglected her for so long, and still refused to accept his responsibilities on her account, to return into all the old favour. She once told him that she did not like Baird, but he saw little sign of it.

However, there was more truth in her words than he thought. She did not like Andy so much as what he stood for—the wild free life that was beginning to call to her returning strength. As her health flourished, so her rebellion—she felt that this life at Towncreep was hedging her in just like her life in London, though in a different way. Everything was bounded by the same standards of conventionality just as in town it had been bounded by the same standards of unconventionality. Raphael, though he was delightful to read with, was so hopelessly correct in his attitude towards her; Eliza Huggett was horrified to see her smoke; and Mr. Harris had never spoken to her since in a sudden gush of friendship and hospitality she had asked him to tea in her bedroom.

She must get out of this, and Andy was the only person who could get her out. Time had blunted the memory of that sharp hour on the Forest, when she had owed her deliverance simply to the fact that he was young enough to be frightened of her scream. At all events, she had fallen into the habit of attributing all the terrors and hardships of

those days to the approach of her illness. Typhoid takes some time to come on—no wonder that during those days experience had been cruel. He had never mentioned her return to the Show, except indefinitely, as a matter of course. Her progress, still slow, admitted of no definite plans; but this indefiniteness was biassing her horribly. Sometimes, in bed at night, a sweat of fear would burst out on her, when she pictured herself alone with Andy, but in daylight fear hid with her dreams.

Baird saw her about three times a week—he would appear at Towncreep about two or three in the afternoon, and stay till six or seven, when he had to return for the opening of the Show. From East Grinstead, Stanger's moved to Shepherd's Hill, and thence would go to King's Standing, so Raphael saw no hopes of deliverance. The burden of Sally's future, once so easily borne, now bowed him to the earth in wretched prayers. What could he do for her, with no authority, no love? How strange it was to feel so distressed about the future of somebody one did not love!

But the long lane suddenly had a turning.

Sally had by now left her wicker chair, and Moore sat alone in the garden, where the shadows were lengthening. It was one of Baird's "off" days, but Sally was "off" too. He heard her voice in the distance, laughing with Neddy. Suddenly there was a crackling of bushes, and two figures dashed through them, shrieking. Sally came tumbling first, wide-eyed, dishevelled, a baby in her excitement—Neddy at her heels, flushed with pursuit.

"Miss Odiarne!" cried Raphael aghast, "please take care! Stop running—Neddy, stop!"

They both stopped—in a wild tangle of legs and arms at his feet. Sally lay on her back, laughing boisterously, with Neddy across her—their eyes were round and bright like those of animals.

As he looked at them Raphael's head swam, and the next moment he caught up Neddy and kissed him. It was a sudden contact with warm and supple limbs and a flushed

cheek, then father and son shrank apart, and stared at each other. The boy blushed furiously, and Raphael gazed at him half-ashamed. The wild sudden burst of love for his child was gone, and the remembrance of his emotion embarrassed them both. But as he looked at Sally, now sitting on her heels, he understood. His love, his kiss, had not been for Neddy at all. He had caught him up and kissed him as a proxy for that other mass of play and laughter at his feet—for Sally.

CHAPTER VIII

FATE AND EACH OTHER

TOWARDS the end of September, Professor Wetherill decided to go to Italy, rejoicing his secretary with the thought of a month's leave. Raphael, who was not accustomed to more than a fortnight's summer-holiday, looked forward eagerly to the twenty-eighth, when Wetherill started. It was on a Monday, and on Saturday he would take his last tramp to Legsheath—his last till the heather faded.

Life, the exterior, explicit life, had not been much changed by his discovery of a fortnight back. He had kept it to himself, fearing to speak, for Sally had shown no sign of realizing that the kiss he had given Neddy had been meant for her. So their relations had been as before, tenderly aloof. He would speak to her in a week or two. He would have more chance then. A freer intercourse, a more constant association, would give him an advantage over Baird, whom he now considered favoured in the fight.

He saw her on the morning of the twenty-sixth, just before he started for Legsheath. She was practically well in body, but of late a shadow on her face had pointed to sickness of mind. He greeted her kindly, but did not stay. One more tussle with the Sixth Sense and the Anthology of Shepherds, and he would be free to linger daylong at her side.

For the first time, Sally was up for breakfast. It was five months since the beginning of her illness, and even convalescence was over now. She was well—yet she could not eat, and afterwards, when she left the farmhouse for the lane, she dragged her legs wearily. She felt like a mur-

derer who, himself injured, is nursed back to health that he may take his trial. The pain, the weariness, the weakness, were over, but the future—hitherto held off by the doctor's hand—was coming to grips at last.

The early part of September had been rainy, but now the hot weather had lasted for some days. A delicious clearness was in the sky and in the valleys, so that one saw the russets of fields far away. The heather was fading on the low slopes of the Forest, in full bloom on the brows, scented with honey and musicked with bees. But Sally avoided the Forest, and followed her lane up to Fairwarp, a cluster of houses on the Hartfield road.

Stanger's Show left King's Standing either on Sunday or Monday, and she expected Andy to come and see her that afternoon. Saturday was a busy day, but he would want to say good-bye. She dreaded meeting him, for she knew that she would have to consult him about her future—she would have to consult either him or Moore, and, for the old odd reason, she preferred him. Nevertheless, she knew that his counsel would be dangerous; though his behaviour to her at Towncreep had been physically restrained, his words, not wildly uttered, had been wild.

She was on the road to King's Standing now, and possibly she would meet him—but she hardly thought so, as the day was still young. Her heart leaped against her side when a sudden turning of the road brought them face to face.

"Hullo, Sal," he drawled, "I was coming to see you, but you've saved me the trouble."

"I thought I'd like a walk—I'm quite well now."

"You look fine"—and his voice was more animated than usual.

"I'm quite fit—but—I'm rather wretched, Andy."

He did not answer, but gazed at her through his half-shut lids, as they strolled along together.

"It's about the future. What am I to do?"

"Come away with me, of course."

"You know I can't do that."

"But you're just going to do that."

"I'm not—indeed I'm not. Do let's talk about things sensibly. I can't stay at Towncreep any longer, and yet I can't leave it."

"I don't call that 'talking about things sensibly.' You must either stay at Towncreep or you must leave it. Take my advice and clear out while the weather's decent for tramping—you'll ruin that fellow Moore if he has to keep you all the winter."

"Keep me! Andy, you beast, what do you mean? You've been paying for me at Towncreep. I'm jolly grateful, and I'll pay you back as soon as ever I can."

"That's a good lass—I love your pretty sentiments; but you shouldn't waste them on the wrong man."

"You mean to say I've been living all these months at Mr. Moore's expense—why, you wrote and told me you'd do it——"

"And I did—for the first fortnight; but I got hard up and couldn't manage it any longer. I knew he'd step into the breach."

Sally stood still, furiously, chokingly angry—with Raphael. Baird congratulated himself on his diplomacy.

"You see, you can't possibly let the poor chap go on spreading himself like that. He's as poor as a church mouse."

"No . . . I can't . . . I won't. But I won't go with you."

"Then what'll you be doing?"

"I'll tramp alone."

"You can't do that, old girl, and you know it."

"Then I'll go back to London. I'll give up all hope of being original. Oh, Andy, do help me to go back to town. You're the only man who can help me and——"

"I'm going to help you. But you must come with me."

He laid his hand lightly on her hip, and looked at her fixedly. Her cheeks mounted the allure, and he bent for-

ward . . . the next moment she was off, scampering through the dust, glancing agonizedly over her shoulder, to see him striding after her.

She turned down a little lane, grown with grass. The picture became burnt into her mind—the russeting hedges each side of her, before her a meadow hill on which stood a little red house, every white-rimmed window clear in the crystal air. She heard his footsteps thudding after her; he would soon overtake her, and the cold rushed down her spine—yet her lips were parted with smiles as well as gasps. It was thus Daphne fled from Apollo—perhaps it was thus Daphne felt.

He was close to her, she heard him breathe, the next moment felt his breath. She stopped and cowered; he seized her and kissed her. His kisses came hot and fast, as on the Forest; she was terror-stricken, as on the Forest, but mixed with the terror was a wicked alien which would not let her scream. She opened her mouth once or twice, but deferred her shriek—she would wait till panic had killed the happy traitor within the gates.

There was the thud of horses' hoofs in the loam of a near field, with their driver's chirrup. Andy loosed his clasp, leaving the terror and the traitor both alive. The colour leaped over Sally's cheeks, and her head dropped forward.

"Well—'Andy you beast!'—aren't you going to say that? It's the proper thing to say."

He stood a trifle flushed, a trifle embarrassed, but not in the same way as on the Forest.

Sally did not answer, and he came forward and lifted one of her hands.

"That wasn't foolish, Sal."

She knew it.

"So you must come with me to-morrow."

"Oh no, Andy."

"Oh, yes——"

The gate at their side was open, and the horses swung slowly through. Andy once more laid his hand on her hip.

"You're coming, Sally, and I'll tell you why. We've done with pretence and all that play; we're going into the big brave world together—out into the highroads, to the commons, against the wind, under the stars. We've done for ever with strait-waistcoats, you and I—you can't live that sort of life; you know it. So I'll meet you to-morrow morning early, at half-past four, down at the throws yonder. Do you see that wee house? It's called Nettlefold Gun, and it's there you must meet me, to-morrow—promise."

Never in her life had she heard him make such an animated speech. His eyes were wide open, too, and his hand was heavy against her.

"I can't promise," she said faintly, "but, look here, I'll do my best . . . perhaps I'll come. If I'm not at Nettlefold Gun to-morrow at half-past four, you'll know I'm not coming. But perhaps I'll be there."

"You must be there."

"I'm not going to bind myself; I'll only say 'perhaps.' You're right about my having to give up this sort of life, and since you won't help me, I don't see what else I'm to do. Still, I only say 'perhaps.'"

He made no answer, and they were soon back on the high road.

"I must go home now."

"Won't you come with me and have dinner at a pub. or somewhere?"

"No, thank you. I really must go."

He kissed her.

"Good-bye, lassie—and mind—Nettlefold Gun to-morrow at half-past four."

He strolled off towards King's Standing, and she called after him—

"Perhaps."

She walked quickly till she had turned the corner and shut out his lazy figure. Then she stopped dead. Once more she was face to face with one of those self-revelations which sent her staggering into whirligigs. The mad

outburst of the Forest had been repeated, that chaos of dangerous kisses— and *she had liked it.*

She pressed her hands to her eye-balls, conscious that she stood face to face with problems which she had never in her whole life imagined it possible she would confront. A certain "Thou shalt not" had for the first time to be taken literally, not in any mystic or spiritual sense, but in all the hideous nakedness of the letter. The tears surged up in her throat, and she sobbed.

For a long time she had stood at her moral climacteric knowing that from it she would pass into better or worse; but never till to-day had she realized the full depths of the abyss into which she might fall. All hell seemed to yawn before her, every villainy seemed possible to her treacherous heart. Her desires were clear as a pond in lightning. She knew that she wanted to rejoin Stanger's Show, to go back to the highways and the high roads with Andy Baird, to drink of adventure and tremble in her sleep. She knew also what such a course would involve—not merely hardship and misconception. She knew that she could not associate with Baird on the old terms; the days of comradeship and philandering were over, to return to him would be a far, far bolder step than their alliance of five months ago; that had been merely unconventional, this would be ruin—and such a conviction was the bait of the whole concern! If she had known that the old relations would stand she would not have been so enticed. And yet it was not the sin, but the danger of the sin, that attracted her.

She struggled a few steps further, then fell against a gate, looking over it at the purple hills of the Forest, flecked with the moving shadows of clouds. She stared at them dumbly, till the fogs of her tears had blotted them out, then suddenly she shot out her arms with the old cry—

"O, Faithful and True! Faithful and True! . . . Save me!"

The prayer seemed to open a gate in her beleaguered heart, and other prayers rushed out, driving back the enemy for

a while. Staring away towards the Forest, she laid bare her grief to her hero, trusting that His stretched-out arm would save. Nothing else could help her; if left to herself she would certainly be at Nettlefold Gun to-morrow. But perhaps something would happen, "O, Faithful and True! Faithful and True! . . . Make something happen to save me!"

After that she felt better, and walked home to Towncreep for dinner. The afternoon she spent in the walled garden, listening lazily to the farm-sounds—the "shut-in" feeling was pleasant for a space.

The sunset began early. The high clouds kindled, and the flame spread in the west. A trembling light crept over the Forest, making the hollows wonderful. Sally thought she would go to meet Neddy on his return from school, but before she had gone far she changed her mind, and decided to climb. The chimney of Isle of Thorns stood out against the sky, and she remembered that she had not been there since her tea-party with Moore, five months ago.

The thought of Raphael still had power to kick up her wrath. What business had he to pay for her board at Towncreep? He ought to have let her know that Andy's supplies had failed. It maddened her to think herself the object of his unobtrusive charity. She would rather, she told herself, have him legally bound to support her—her husband—than befriending her out of his natural goodness of heart.

Thus fuming she came to Isle of Thorns, and before passing into the bushes, stood on the hillside, looking down the slope of the Forest to the Weald—faint hazy pinks of mist and woods. It occurred to her that she was as likely to meet Moore that evening as she had been likely to meet Baird that morning, because she was invading his territory, just as in the morning she had invaded Andy's. She knew also that, in spite of her rage, she wanted to meet him, and had deliberately put herself in his way. That

morning, in blank perplexity, she had sought out Andy to help her, and now, in even deeper dilemma, she turned to Moore. He was the one prop she had left, and, much as she shrank from approaching him, it was either his hand or a fall.

The light was paling and pearling in the clouds, and the wind that sped up to her over the heather had the scent and the chill of an autumn dusk. She wondered where Raphael was, and at the same time heard a crackling of the thorn bushes beside her. He must have come down over the brow of the hill, by Plawhatch and Slumber Wood. She turned into the thicket and met him outside the cottage door.

"Good-evening, Miss Odiarne. This is a delightful surprise for me. But I hope you haven't tired yourself by walking too far."

"Oh no, I'm not tired," she said, preceding him into the outer room, "but I'm very cross."

"I hope nothing has gone wrong."

"It has indeed, and it's your fault. You ought to have told me that Mr. Baird hadn't paid for me all those months and that you——"

"Please don't mention it. I didn't want to trouble you."

"But it wasn't fair to me, when you know how I hate——"

She stopped and bit her lips, as she saw him flush painfully.

"I'm so sorry you look at things in that light. I can't understand why you won't let me help you. It gives me such pleasure."

She met his eyes, and something in their grey depths startled her—unfortunately for him, for it banished the relenting spirit his mildness had brought.

"I can't help it. You must see that you're in a different position from Andy. He's an old friend—we rag and chaff together—I don't mind letting him do things for me."

Her words had the double disadvantage of being both untrue and incredible. She knew that they did not define

her relations with Andy, and that he did not accept the definition.

"I think it's unkind of you not to trust me as much as Mr. Baird. I can't see that I have done anything to deserve this."

"I didn't say I didn't trust you, merely that I prefer to trust my friend."

He coloured again, this time with anger.

"You prefer to trust the man who has brought you nothing but trouble, who has tried and is still trying to lead you to disaster. You trust him rather than the man who loves you and would give his life to save you from the evils of the way you've chosen."

It was anger, sheer anger, that sent the words to his lips. He had not intended to utter them till the end of his holidays, when association should have given him a better chance with them. If ever he had pictured himself suddenly impelled to speak, it had been in the throes of a great love or a great compassion, and here he was, speaking in a great rage.

Sally stepped back from him, and stared. There was a strained, heavy silence, broken only by the cheep of a bird on the roof.

"You don't mean that, do you?" she said at last. Never since their first meeting had she imagined that Moore loved her. He had not given a sign of it till a minute ago in his eyes. He had always called her "Miss Odiarne," whereas the other men she had known had generally drifted into "Sally" at the end of a month; he had given her no draped allusions, no esoteric phrases from love's Kabbala. He had not taken advantage of one lonely talk, one friendly dusk. Sally had not so learned love.

"Mean it!—of course I mean it! I've loved you for weeks. I didn't mean to tell you so soon, but I couldn't help it just now—though I know I've damaged myself and spoiled my chances."

She did not speak, uncertain whether to be angry or pitiful.

"I've very little to offer you," he continued humbly, "but if you love me only half as much as I love you, I think I could make you happy."

She was still silent, and drew back a step.

"I get a hundred and fifty a year from Wetherill, but I daresay he would give me a rise—anyhow, I could bring it up to two hundred by private work. We could manage on that, couldn't we? Oh, I know I'm not offering you enough, but that's not so hard on you as on me, for I should like to lay the Indies at your feet."

The last sentiment, which did not belong to his groove, roused her a little. Then suddenly she caught her breath. Perhaps this was the answer to her prayer, "Oh, make something happen to save me." Perhaps this mysterious surprising confession had been sent her from Raphael's lips by Faithful and True, holding out to her the one hope of safety.

"Speak to me, answer me. Don't keep me in suspense."

She longed to cry, "No!" but felt that if she did so she would be flying in the face of Providence and flinging her one chance away. The answer to her prayer had come, and woe betide her if she neglected so great a salvation.

"Do you really love me?" she asked, to give herself time.

"How can you ask that?"

He laid his hand on her arm, and looked pleadingly into her eyes. Hitherto he had been physically most shy of her. He had apologized even if his hand touched hers at table; and now she felt a thrill at his first caress. Something in his strained look touched her, and something in the strong sweet lines of his mouth made her feel like a frightened bird.

"Oh, Raphael," she cried, "if you care to have a ragamuffin like me—why, have me!"

The expression of his eyes did not turn into relief, as she had expected, and instinctively she realized that Mar-

garet had accepted his proposal very differently. She struggled to be more becomingly conventional.

"I'm really not good enough for you, dear, but if you will teach me how to be good, I'll try."

"Don't say that; it's not that I want—do you love me, Sally?"

"Oh yes. . . ."

The strained look vanished from his eyes and they became strangely luminous. His hand slipped from her arm to her waist, and trembled as he drew her close to him. Then he bent his head. . . .

Instinct made Sally spring away, with lifted elbow and a sudden fall of hair. Then she ran from him into the inner room. He would follow her and the morning's ecstacy would be repeated with the difference that his kisses would be pure. Then she would love him, she knew it. Her heart beat as if to choke her, and she thrilled with the old delicious fear; she could run no further, and fell against the wall. She waited there for him, her shoulders high, her cheek against the stone. Would he hold her as Andy had held her, one hand on her heart, the other under it—he, the cold, restrained Raphael? In her rapture she kissed the wall. . . .

But he did not come.

At last she looked over her shoulder, and saw him standing by the doorway, a pained expression in his eyes.

"Why won't you let me kiss you?" he asked her, as she came to him.

"I'd have let you kiss me if you had come"; and there was a ring of contemptuous anger in her voice.

"Come. . . ."

"Come after me."

"But you ran away."

"You should have followed."

"No decent man would kiss a woman against her will."

"You might be indecent just for once, to celebrate our engagement."

Her tone was flippant enough to strike her own ears. She felt disappointed in him, and pouted at him as he stood awkwardly beside her.

"Perhaps I may kiss you now?" he said.

She was mollified by his humility. "Yes, you may."

He stooped forward and kissed her very gently, without touching her besides.

The stars were shining through the torn roof. He went into the inner room and fetched her hat which had dropped off there, then he took her hand, and led her out of the cottage. The sunset was gone from the Forest and the thorn-bushes, only the top of the chimney, high against the clear trembling sky, wore gold. They both looked up at it, and Raphael smiled.

He spoke very little as they walked through the heather. Ahead of them the great slope rolled into the Weald, where the first mists steamed up towards the stars. A fold bell rang in the distance, over at Butchersbarn, with the cry of a shepherd on the hills.

For some reason Raphael still annoyed Sally. She did not regret having accepted him; indeed, she was now glad of it. But he irritated her, and made her wildly flippant.

"I hope you won't want me to tell you all the secrets of my past," she said; "it would be bad politics. Peg once said that my biography could be fitly illustrated only by the Snark. You know the adage—

> 'If any young man should marry you,
> Don't ever you tell the joke,
> How you spent the night in a sentry-box,
> Wrapped up in a soldier's cloak.'"

"Sally—dear."

"Oh, there's no good expecting I'll ever be as decorous as you—I've not got the stuff in me. But we'll get on all the better for it; we'll be like the fiddles and the trombones in Tannhäuser. Don't look so glum. It'll be all

right for you—the trombones smash the fiddles in the end."

"I wish you wouldn't treat this as a joke. It's so very sacred to me."

"And you think nothing's sacred to me, I suppose. Raphael, I don't believe you think I've any religion."

"Oh, Sally, I never said that. I'm sure you have, you must have—and that reminds me of something."

They had reached Towncreep Farm, and stood in the drive before it, their young figures gracious in the dusk.

"I should like you to come with me to the Holy Eucharist to-morrow, Sally. I feel we ought to thank God together for our great happiness."

"Oh yes, I'd love to come. Before I was ill, I always went to Communion."

"I'm so glad. We'll go to Dane Hill Church—I don't like the service at Maresfield; I prefer something more definitely Catholic."

"I know you do," said Sally mischievously; "I saw you at Dane Hill."

"You saw me! When?"

"The Sunday before I was ill. Oh, Raphael, I felt so wretched. I had to go out. I wanted to receive with you, but I should have fainted if I'd stayed."

"You wanted to receive with me! . . . Oh, Sally!"

He was touched both by the human and by the divine joy of what she had said, and the quiver of both was in his arms as he took her to him.

On a sudden the dregs of her frivolity were gone. A great yearning, a great misery, seized her, and she flung her arms round his neck, hiding her face in his breast, like a child who thinks it sees a ghost behind it.

"Oh, Raphael, dear Raphael! . . . Save me!"

CHAPTER IX

SALLY SLIDES DOWN THE ROOF

Her feeling during the first part of that evening was one of elation. She was engaged, at twenty-three. She had often envied other girls their engagements, especially young girls; no one had ever proposed to her, and she had so much wanted to be engaged young, just for the pride of the thing. Now she was engaged and going soon to be married. With her joy was mingled a proprietary emotion. Not only was she engaged, but engaged to the most presentable man in the room. How well her Raphael compared with Mr. Griggs, the French-gardening pupil, and Mr. Harris, the lay-reader! She felt proud of him, with his handsome refined face, and well-cut clothes. When he stretched out his arm to pass her the bread, she thrilled to see the watch on his wrist, so superior, with its small face and narrow strap, to Mr. Griggs's uncle-bequeathed ponderosity of gold and seals, and Mr. Harris's nickel turnip, for ever fished out to be compared with Mr. Griggs's. She felt proud to own the creature opposite her, and she also felt a proprietary interest in Neddy. Every time she and the lad met each other's eyes it was their habit to smile, and to-night they kept glancing and smiling. Sally fairly beamed on her future step-son.

Dear little Neddy! She was rather sorry for him under present circumstances; Raphael was so frightfully strict, in spite of his gentleness. For a moment a doubt shot into her heart as to whether he would be strict with her. Good people so often were martinets, and, being High Church, he would be sure to have uncomfortable views on marriage. It would be his wife's sacramental duty to

devote herself to her home and her children. . . . Ah, her children! there was another difficulty. Nothing, nothing, Sally told herself, would persuade her to have a child, but she felt sure that Raphael would want children; he would think her aversion wicked and unnatural. Men always did—safe dogs, who had nothing to suffer in parenthood and nothing to dare. As she looked across at the calm and delicate Raphael, for the first time she realized certain facts, certain tyrannies to be expected from that mild creature; and the blood went up into her cheeks and a cold shudder down her spine.

But she hastened to reassure herself. After all, she had made Providence her debtor. She had boldly grasped at the straw held out to her drowning arm, and the powers that had given her direction would reward her obedience with peace.

There were two "if's" in that day's dealing which might have altered the whole course of after events. The first was—if Moore had followed Sally into the inner room at Isle of Thorns and kissed her breath away; the second was—if Sally had gone to bed immediately after supper. She thought of doing so, for the night was damp with fogs, and there was no chance of a moon-walk with Raphael; but after some consideration she changed her mind, and followed the rest of the company into the sitting room. Perhaps the others would go to bed early, and leave her and Raphael alone.

Alas! The creditor of Providence as yet knew little of the vagaries of her debtor. She settled herself with her book where she could see Moore, "her young man," as she had begun to call him. They were not going to announce their engagement till the next day; but she liked to catch his eye and see him blush; she had never met a man who blushed so much as Raphael.

He sat down by the window, and, as usual, asked permission to smoke, before he lit his evening cigarette. Sally herself had not smoked since Eliza Huggett had one eve-

ning asked her not to, "because of the other boarders." An uncontrollable desire seized her to smoke to-night, for she felt that she might not have many more chances. "I hope to goodness my young man won't stop my baccy." The thought quite upset her for a moment, and her book lay unread on her lap.

Neddy had gone to bed after a shy good-night to his father, so one of Sally's props was lost. A little chill crept into her heart as she looked round the room. Sister sat in the low chair next her, crocheting. For some days her crochet had been the centre of interest at Towncreep, as, after many conflicting portents, it had lately shown signs of turning into a man's tie. "Not quite proper, I call it," Sissy would say with a giggle, proudly preserving their little mystery; for why should all Towncreep know that Sister was merely making a birthday present for their brother George in Canada? There was something almost furious in Sally's eyes, as she watched the melancholy brown and green dangle; her engagement had ceased to thrill her so divinely with her advantage. Rather, she was possessed by the thought that to the end of her days she would have to sit thus, watching Sister's needle, metaphorically, if not literally, living in an atmosphere of crochet.

Sissy was puzzling over some kindergarten work; Mr. Griggs was reading a book on manure. Mr. Harris stood by the piano, fingering a copy of the Hymnal Companion. Sally watched him anxiously, for the thought of the coming Sabbath was often wont to inebriate the lay-reader on Saturday night and plunge him into desperate orgies with the Hymnal Companion, and Mrs. Ewland, who, though too asthmatic to sing, invariably played his accompaniments, with a fine disregard for the key signature.

Sally longed to go out with Raphael, but she knew he would never allow her to plunge into that white dripping blanket which she could see against the pane. Neither would such a decorous Grundy consent to come upstairs and sit with her in her room. His peaceful face annoyed

her. How could he bear these people? How dare he bear them? He would expect her to bear them too, perhaps. It was not likely that on two hundred a year he would take her to a house of his own. No, they would have to stay on at Towncreep till Sister had made a thousand ties, and the Hymnal Companion had dropped to pieces. Oh, damn!

"I am a stranger here,
Heaven is my home,
Life is a desert drear,
Heaven is my home."

Sally stared across at Raphael. He was calmly reading, and when at last he lifted his eyes he smiled. Oh, if only these people would go to bed and leave her alone with him, then he might be able to soothe her furies away. But being Saturday night, and no early risings necessary the next day, they would probably stay on, bawling and strumming and knitting ties, till Mrs. Huggett came to put the lights out at half-past ten. And yet the chance was there, so she would not go to bed herself.

A terrible realization had come to her, the realization that after all it would be possible for her to meet Andy to-morrow at Nettleford Gun. For the last few hours she had somehow thought that, whatever the discomforts of her situation, one danger at least was averted. Now she knew that danger was still possible. After all she had suffered, after all she had felt and dreaded, she might still meet Andy at Nettleford Gun.

She ceased to make any pretence to read, but sat with her hands folded on her book, staring at Raphael as if his profile were the serpent in the wilderness. It was nearly ten o'clock, and still no one showed any signs of moving. Sister was clucking in soft reproof at the tie, which had become lopsided in its struggle for existence. Mr. Griggs had abandoned his manure only for a game of halma with

Sissy, much elated at the honour, and already signing the register in imagination. Mrs. Ewland still ignored the key signature, and Mr. Harris continued to inform all whom it might concern that heaven was his home.

"I shall die if this goes on," thought Sally; but she didn't, though it went on till half-past ten, when Eliza Huggett appeared with her tired, week-end smile. There was a general lighting of candles in the passage outside. Sally's hand touched Raphael's hungrily over the matchbox; she loved his slim strong wrist, grown with dark hairs and circled by a strap; she would have liked to kiss it, just where the pulse beat. But fate was inexorable, or rather, she thought, Raphael was very stupid; he made some blundering attempts to stay behind the others, but Sissy was being very coquettish over a broken match for Mr. Griggs's benefit, and it ended in he and Sally being swept into the ascending caravan, to part at the stairhead, where their ways divided.

She was angry with him, and would not meet his eyes, though she knew well enough she would have seen comfort there. They shook hands, and his would have retained hers, but she pulled it away. Below them the house was dark, except for the splutterings of Sissy's match, and both ends of the passage throbbed with receding stars, as the candle-bearers sought their bedroom doors. The wind gave a sudden moan round the house, and it was a minute at once ludicrous and divine.

When Sally reached her room she was not sure whether or not she was disappointed. She opened the window and leaned out, but the fog did not allow her to see much. Her window looked into a kind of courtyard on three sides of which old Towncreep was built. Opposite her was the room occupied by Sister and Sissy, and the light of their casement freaked the mist with strange gold rods. She wondered what Raphael was doing; had their parting made him happy or wretched? At any rate he was calmer than she, he had not lived through such a strenuous day.

What a day it had been! It seemed impossible that it had lasted only twelve hours, and, worst of all, there was an unfinished air about it. She felt that she could look back on it serenely if only she could realize it was finished. But she could not. The hardest thought of all was this realization that after all her doings, all her yieldings, she was still free to meet Andy at Nettlefold Gun.

The possibility of her keeping tryst seemed each second to grow in strength. Part of the impulse was mere morbidness, built on terror, but the rest had solid foundation enough. After all, the fact that she had become engaged to a man who was in every point her contrast, whom, in spite of certain riotous emotions, she did not love, only made escape from Towncreep more necessary. Instead of winning the game, she had merely doubled her stakes. She had not realized that.

With an exclamation of dismay she swung round from the window, and for a moment wished she had asked Raphael to lock her into her room. But the thought was hardly in her mind before she mocked it. What nonsense! He would only have thought her a lunatic; and she could trust herself perfectly—she wouldn't be such a fool as to fling away her chances like that.

She began to undress quickly, and was soon on her knees. Everything would be easy to-morrow after she had been to Communion with Raphael. She lingered over the thought, feeding her tired heart on it.

Her preparation consisted of little else—the picturing and repicturing of herself and him kneeling together. At last she rose, and laid herself down. She could see out of the window from her bed, the fogs with the light of the room opposite burning through them. The stillness was intense, for the mist choked the sighings of night; it oppressed her and depressed her, and with one hand she pulled away the bedclothes and with the other wiped her tears.

Sleep was far off, waiting, she knew, for the events of

the day to be reviewed and set in order—and what a day! Once more she gasped at it. She wondered what Peg and the others would say if they knew that Sally Odiarne, Mysterium Magnum, had become engaged to a High Church widower with one child—to such terms had disillusion's Algebra reduced her splendid young man. A widower with only two hundred a year, too! Imagination painted widowers rich, but Raphael she called a beggar. She felt that he had treated his poverty lightly, conscious that it was riches in comparison with hers. Fool of a man! he didn't know that one is much more comfortably off on nothing a year than on two hundred. She knew people who fared sumptuously on nothing a year, but who would have been forced to economize at once had they been bequeathed two hundred. Men could call their souls their own on gracious nothing; it wanted a couple of hundred to make them slaves.

She tossed about restlessly, uncertain as to which she grieved at most—Raphael's poverty or the complacency with which he viewed it. If he had chafed in his chain she could have hoped and pardoned, but his meekness, or rather disregard, shut all doors. Of course, if she had really loved him she could have borne everything, but Sally had never deceived herself as to her feelings for Moore; they were quite enough to guarantee her happiness if circumstances were kind, but she doubted very much what they would do for her in despite of circumstances.

An hour now had passed, the light opposite was extinguished, and still she lay awake. She watched the mist in its changing; it seemed to sink between the wings of Towncreep, and she could see the roof-line opposite, and above it hung the Wain. There seemed to her something definitely evil in that huge tilted plough; she remembered how she and Raphael and Andy had seen it glimmering above the Weald, five months ago, just at the beginning of sorrows. It seemed to mock her now, watching her misery, and yet removed from it by billions of miles. It

was like a pot with a crooked handle, "And I said, 'Lord, I see a seething pot.'"

Oh, if only she could go to sleep, and not wake till it was time to rise for the Altar of God! She shut her eyes, and lay desperately still; her battle would be over if only she could sleep till six. Then a new thought struck her —Andy had asked her to meet him at half-past four; that meant that he and she were going away alone. She knew Stanger's Show too well to think that those weary men and women, not in bed till midnight, would be up at four. The Show itself would probably not leave King's Standing till the afternoon. It was strange that she had not realized this before. Andy evidently wanted to cover their traces, lest any one should try to win her back. She had learned to give him credit for far greater astuteness than one would guess from his fat lazy face; he probably knew all about Moore's love for her, the salvation hid from her eyes.

Also, he doubtless knew that, alone, he would have more power over her—it did not require much sharpness to see that. The danger which six hours ago had tickled Sally, now frightened her, and for a moment she gasped with relief, thinking panic had killed desire. But she soon knew better. Though she was terrified of him, though she distrusted him, saw through his treason, she still longed to meet Andy at Nettlefold Gun. She seemed to feel against her cheek the wind that has kissed many pastures, and under her feet the marl of the great road that runs on for ever. On one side she saw the Towncreep parlour, with Sister knitting ties, and perhaps a child or two of her own whimpering upstairs in the bedroom already too small for her and Raphael; on the other side, she saw the view from the Forest heights, the down, the sea, the roads, the spaceless liberties of the sky.

If only she could have loved Andy, her battle would have been simpler. The clash of love and duty was commonplace, ten thousandfold repeated in experience; but she now

warred with subtleties, shreds of desire, threads of reluctance, every kind of fragment and tatter. The fact was that she loved neither of these men, and yet she loved something intimately connected with each. She loved Raphael's qualities of good and beauty, but even that longing to kiss his arm, which had seized her at candle-lighting, had been entirely unconnected with his real self; she loved a great deal that belonged to him, his goodness, his simplicity, his culture, his hand, but the real man baffled her, gently pushed her back. On the other hand, it was nothing belonging to Andy that she loved, but what he stood for. He stood for the life in which she believed she at last would "find herself"—the heights of the Forest were all his; the sunny fields, the gales, the constellations, all spoke of him, the stout lazy Baird, and never gave her a word of Moore. It was this association with nature which gave Andy a kind of cosmic significance, whereas, Raphael spelt nothing but domesticity to her mind.

The night was now far advanced, and still Sally tossed awake. She felt wretchedly unprepared for her Communion, and for the first time a faint terror of God shot into her heart. For years she had nursed close her hero-worship—of Faithful and True on His white horse, with His secret name on His thigh. It was the only possible faith for her, and through all the vapours of her chaotic little life, she had been able to follow her debonair Christ; but now He seemed to have departed from her, the thunder of His hoofs was far away, and she cried after Him like a lost child in the dark.

She realized with increasing force that her only chance was to sleep through the hour of temptation, and she felt that the least the Providence she had so obligingly treated could do was to make arrangements for that. Rather to her surprise, it did. The first of the white morning had not come into the sky before she slept.

She slept heavily, too; only just before waking she dreamed—of the little red house with the staring windows

which she had seen at the end of the lane when she fled from Andy. She saw it shimmering in the rarefied atmosphere of dreams. Then it faded into her old vision of the two men fighting. This time neither of them was Raphael; on the contrary they were like mechanical toys, butting each other with clockwork precision, and a kind of "click-clack," which she was surprised not to hear when she woke.

The daylight was in the room, as yet without the sun. Sally started upon her elbow and looked agonizedly at the clock, all the consciousness of her need upon her. Then she gave a smothered cry of relief. It was a quarter past five.

Smiling to herself, and shutting her heart to feelings that were half regretful, she slid out of bed, and trod across the room. The scene from her window was drawn with tremulous serenity—it reminded her of a water-colour in its soft clear tones. Over the roof-line opposite showed the top of a poplar, while the sky was of a pale, luminous blue, still ghostly with the afterglow of stars. From Sally's window several feet of tile-roofing sloped towards the yard, and on this, his chin in his hands, his face turned up towards her, lay Andy Baird.

* * * * *

"I was just going to throw up a pebble," he said, blinking.

"Oh, Andy!" she cried, "why have you come?"

"Because you didn't."

"But I've no intention of coming—I've changed my mind."

"Well, I haven't."

She stared at him helplessly, shivering in the gust of the open window and her thin nightgown.

"Oh Lord!" she cried suddenly, "how I hate you!" and the two halves of her exclamation were connected by more than a gasp.

"Why?"

"Come, hurry up, lassie," he said good-humouredly.

"Hurry up and put on your little duds, and be off with me on a Sunday morning."

"Oh, Andy, I'm sure the Show hasn't left King's Standing."

"Of course it hasn't, dearie, but I have, and you're coming with me. They're waiting down at the throws, my horse and my wee tilt-cart. Young Ryley Carew is to manage the Thistle till I'm back—we'll have to be doing something to put your young man off the scent."

"Do you know that I'm engaged to Mr. Moore?" she asked loftily.

"I'm not surprised to hear it."

She was infuriated by his calmness in the face of her First and Last.

"And do you think that makes no difference?"

"None, dearie."

She felt she would like to dash her jug of water over him, this catspaw of a traitor Providence. Her arm shot out and her body bent, and she swung up her ewer from the floor.

"Leave this place instantly."

He did not move.

She tilted the jug, and a narrow stream of water poured on the nape of his neck as he lay there smiling. She had missed her fine action, and in its place was a piece of dribbling bathos.

"Come, hurry up, Sal."

"I'm not coming, Andy; I'm going to marry Raphael Moore."

"I don't think."

She fairly wept in her rage, and without realizing what she was doing, continued to tilt her jug with its attenuated stream.

"Oh, you beast! You beast!" she sobbed.

"Dearie, it's time you turned off the tap."

He still lay there, motionless on his stomach, and the ridiculousness of the whole situation made Sally drop her hand.

"Thanks, Sal—and now chuck us out a towel."

"Andy, please, please go."

"Certainly, as soon as you're ready."

Her fate seemed to close upon her, and she weakly held out her hands for grace.

"Come, dress yourself, Sally. I'm sick for you, dear. The little horse and cart are waiting, the morning's waiting and the evening, with a brown tent pitched in a hurst. We're going to have life and joy together, you and I, all among the brambles, and the lanes, and the sheep, and the autumn bonfires. Come out, Sally, and eat blackberries for breakfast."

She had already noticed how much greater a change love seemed to have made in his nature than in Moore's. Raphael in love was very much the same as Raphael out of it, but these enthusiasms of Andy's, with their loss of the Scotch idiom, and their gush of beautiful words, were such a change from his usual mood as to make her vainglorious of her power to evoke them. He had made love over and over again to other girls, but no other girl, she knew, had ever caused him to open his eyes wide, run his words out quickly, become lyrical in his phrases. The blush of pride crept up her cheek, and he saw that he stood to win.

"Come, Sally, and be my little mate."

He had said too much, and she drew back.

"I don't mean anything wrong, dear; I'm perfectly safe, as I've told you before—you shall be your own mistress entirely. I ask only for you to sit beside me in my cart, and be free and happy with me. You shall give me nothing you do not want to give. This is to be just an adventure together."

"I don't believe you, Andy."

"Well, come and prove me."

She shuddered. It was a mere farce to pretend to herself that he was "safe," and yet she yearned to go with him. During the last few moments the sky had been kindling, and the breeze freshening, and with the sunrise had come a mad lust of adventure. Her ears seemed to throb with the beat of horse-hoofs on the highroad, her nostrils to smell the orchards and farmyards she would drive past with Andy.

"Don't tempt me any more," she cried.

He reached up his arms, and with an effort caught her hands from the sill. She fell forward with a stifled scream, thinking she was going to tumble out of the window.

"Reach down your face; I want to kiss you."

The victory was won, both of them precariously balanced, and likely at any moment to find themselves on the stones.

After that there was nothing for Sally to do but dress. She would have liked to cool her hot face, but she had poured all her water over Andy, so she lent him her towel to dry his neck. She gave little sobs as she dressed, partly of happiness, partly of despair. "Oh, what will my poor young man say?" she thought suddenly to herself. His side of the business occurred to her for the first time, and her heart beat uneasily. But she did not love him—never had she realized that more clearly than now, when his sorrow seemed dim and far off, scarcely to be pictured. She did not love him, and she was not worthy of him. Things were best for them both as they stood.

At last she was ready, with one or two chattels in a handkerchief, and her foot on the sill.

For some time Sissy had thought she heard voices in her sleep. At first she tossed, with but a drowsy consciousness; then she realized that it was strange to hear voices so early on a Sunday morning. One was a woman's voice, too, so she could not be listening to a conference between farm-hands. She was completely roused at last, and went to look out of the window. The next moment, a faint cry of "Annie!" woke the elder Miss Evans, and a few seconds later—just the time it takes to put on a blue flannel dressing-gown—both sisters were staring with protruding eyes at the window opposite.

On the sill sat Miss Odiarne, showing a great deal of stocking, her hand in the hand of a man who stood on the tiles. The next moment they were scrambling down the roof together, then he had slid off the edge into the yard, and she jumped into his arms.

PART TWO

"Certainly there is a great virtue in highways and hedges to make an able man, and a good prospect cannot but let him see far into things." —*Samuel Butler.*

PART II

CHAPTER X

RAPHAEL MAKES UP HIS MIND AND CHANGES IT

It was Sister and Sissy who gave the alarm as soon as they had got their breath back—with a rush down the passage, and a flop against Eliza Huggett's bedroom door.

"Miss Odiarne's run away with a man."

Those were the words which seemed mysteriously to run round Towncreep, printing themselves on the very furniture —at least, that was how it appeared to Raphael as he joined the group outside Mrs. Huggett's door. It seemed as if his head had sung with them for years, and yet he was as far off as ever from knowing what they meant.

"I saw her go," panted Sister, with stiff gesticulating arm; "she got out of the window, and they both climbed down the roof. Then he slid off and caught her when she jumped. I know who he was—he was that man who used to come and sit with her in the garden. I often used to see them from the passage window, and I always said something would happen if she sat and talked to men alone."

"Oh, to think!" squealed Sissy, "that there should be an elopement—an *elopement*—from Towncreep, and from the room opposite ours, too! Quite a coincidence, I call it."

"Quite a disgrace, *I* call it; this'll be the ruin of the house," whimpered Miss Evans, and, suddenly realizing that all the company were in their dressing-gowns, she seized her sister's arm, and dragged her away.

Raphael flung on some clothes, and went out to question any farm-hands there might be about. Sensation was returning in little pricks to his heart, numbed at first by the blow; but, all the same, he did not feel awake, and the garden and

fold of Towncreep had put on a pale vague shimmer, like the landscape of a dream.

Joe Harman and Greg Hoad were in the Dutch barn, but they had seen no one, nor heard any footsteps. Raphael came back to explore Sally's room, in vain hopes of a clue, and found Sister and Sissy hunting for the letter-on-the-pincushion which they considered the *sine qua non* of an elopement. But all searches were fruitless. Her bed had been slept in, and in the grate were some scraps of paper, which, after raising delusive expectations, proved to be nothing more than the torn fragments of Watts' "Rider on the White Horse"—these were all the facts to be gathered from a room typical in its mingled coquetry and disorder of the vanished Mysterium Magnum.

"Well, I can't say I'm surprised," said Sissy—"that it's Miss Odiarne who's run away, I mean. As there's been an elopement, it's much more natural for Miss Odiarne to have eloped than any of us."

Raphael agreed with her.

"And I never really liked Miss Odiarne, you know. She often said things that weren't quite nice—not quite proper. And now she and this man——"

"Please do not speak of her any more," said Raphael.

That was how he betrayed himself, but he did not notice it, though Sister and Sissy were both much embarrassed, the latter repeating "man . . . man . . . man" in every variety of tone, as if it had magical properties, and only had to be pronounced rightly to work miracles.

His position was soon made evident to the rest of the household. It was he who put himself at the head of all conferences, and succeeded, in spite of odds, in reducing them to action. In vain Mr. Griggs declared—with winks that grew more and more expressive—that Miss Odiarne was nobody's property, and could take herself off when or where she chose; Raphael would leave no stone unturned, no mountain unmoved. All Towncreep marvelled at the man who had always sat in the background of their debates, quiet,

reserved, his own shy comrade—now ruling their counsels, and insisting on more than words.

"He loved her," Mrs. Ewland wheezed to Mr. Harris, and the words rolled round the room as soon as Moore had left it.

Of course he knew who had taken Sally from him—there was no need of Sister to tell him that—and the knowledge helped him in a measure. At all events, he would inquire at Stanger's Show. Possibly Sally had returned to it; after all, he did not expect that Baird knew of his rival. But Sally knew, and was it likely that she would stay within five miles of him, easily traceable on future wanderings?

He was now broad awake, able to reason and calculate—his own actions, that is to say, for Sally's were still below the horizon. In vain he struggled to account for her madness, it was in another hemisphere, to which it seemed that his understanding could never go sailing. If it had not been for her empty room, the most solemn oaths of Sister and Sissy would not have made him believe she was gone. Why, she was his, plighted to him by troth and love. All night his heart had fed on memories of her touch and voice, of her laugh across the table, of her narrow eyes lifted from her book to smile into his. By morning she was gone, without word or token, and she who had been all his at sunset, at sunrise had given herself to another.

Thus baffled in his meditations he came to King's Standing, to find Stanger's in the throes of departure. The merry-go-round horses and ostriches were being packed into a van, the cocoanut shie and the shooting gallery were being taken to pieces by stalwart heathen. Gertie Madden had made a neat parcel of her gingerbread and her bedding, and had stuffed it into the perambulator where Mrs. Joe's youngest boy lay licking a piece of cocoanut. Mrs. Joe herself sat on the caravan steps, doing her hair, and Raphael, after some hesitation, addressed her.

She welcomed him cordially enough, remembering him well and delighted to have a talk with a "real gent with a face as lovely and innercent as a baby's." Raphael's innercence she

evidently considered more than skin deep, for she made no attempt even to lie synoptically. "She knew nothing about the lad Baird. Oh, it couldn't be him that had run away with Miss Odiarne, because he'd got another mort, and had just gone off with her to Southampton. Oh, she'd no idea where he was; he often went off on business, to buy new revolvers and rifles and such, leaving young Ryley Carew in charge."

Old Stanger, whom Raphael insisted next on interviewing, was not more satisfactory. He had no idea where Baird was, or when he would join the Show again; he often went off on errands of his own. As for Mrs. Stanger, she seemed to regard his question as a personal insult—what should she know about Andy? She didn't keep him in her pocket. Moore saw that these people were stoking him with lies, but all his ruses with them were unavailing. Mrs. Joe glanced at him coyly through her hair; Mrs. Stanger, whose cheeks were tearstained, sucked peppermints in disapproving silence; and Old Stanger's pasty face was like an expressionless lump of dough surrounding a pipe. In the background a group of dirty children clamoured for "a copper, gentleman," and in the end Raphael took himself off, none the wiser, and surprised that such wickedness could exist, even in caravans.

His heart had hardened a little since the morning. He had begun to explore Sally's conduct, and it was not to be expected that he should take kindly to such a strange region. She seemed to him to have acted with a twofold treacherousness, and her sin at sunrise was no blacker than her sin at sunset. Which is the worst, the making of a light vow or the breaking of it? The curves of his mouth were straightening, till between his lips was a hard line of judgment.

When he came back to Towncreep the noonday was throbbing on the roof. Eliza Huggett called him in to eat, and at first the mere mention of food turned him sick. But in a moment he remembered the necessity of preserving a calm front before the other boarders—already, perhaps, he had shown them too much. So he went in, and ate Sunday's

sirloin and potatoes, and tried to talk to Mr. Harris about the morning's sermon, and—which was far more difficult—to Sissy about his visit to King's Standing. And while his teeth munched, and his hand grasped his knife as one grasps a sword, in his ears the glum words of the prophet were ringing: "Son of man, behold I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke; yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down."

It was this very self-control which hardened his heart still more. In the afternoon and evening he made fruitless inquiries at various cottages on the chief roads, but he knew that he had lost some of his eagerness to have them answered. Any knowledge he obtained of Sally he felt must incriminate her still more. Earlier in the day he had tried to think that Baird had taken her from him against her will, but such a belief could be real only to a mind capsized by sorrow. Step by step, the dead march of the hours revealed to him deep plotting—her schemes must have had some shape even while he kissed her at Isle of Thorns. Oh, Sally! Sally! He had lost not only her, but her memory, every tender dream of her. If at that moment he could see her standing before him on the Forest, he would make no attempt to win her back. To have her again after such a loss would be but a poor bargain. He was a fool to have ever deserted his city of retrospect—he had come out of it after a mirage. He had thought to find a living love for a living woman, a pure and ideal passion which would ennoble him in his own eyes and the eyes of God—instead of which, here he was left forlorn, stranded, disillusioned, with a tale as piteous and ridiculous as any of the loves of poor Hoffman. Why had he taken his allegiance from the dead? The dead are always faithful, always meek. They never distress us with rivals or vex us with moods, or disillusion us with a sudden nakedness. They are the ideal lovers, the dead.

* * * * *

The next morning at breakfast Raphael found a letter by his plate. He had seen the handwriting before, and miser-

able pangs ate into his heart as he tore the envelope. Twenty-four hours ago he would have thanked Heaven for an explanation; now he shrank from it, for it could be nothing but a fresh blow on his broken idol's head. The postmark was Lindfield, and the letter was written "In Mockbeggar Wood at sunset." It began abruptly.

"And I expect all this time, my poor splendid young man, you've been cursing me, you who never knew what it was to curse anybody. Probably when you've read this letter you will curse still louder. It's meant to explain matters, but, being written by me, it's sure to have the opposite effect. Well, I have behaved abominably and I own it. I am entirely to blame. During the first few hours I was swearing at the Elohim for having forced my hand, but now I see that they did nothing of the kind. It is true that circumstances were rather stiff, but my mind was perfectly clear and my conscience highly vociferous. I never thought for a moment that I was not doing wrong in going off with Andy. If I had, then I might have blamed the Elohim, but I didn't, so no one's guilty but me—neither Heaven nor earth nor time nor place nor any other creature.

"I have often wondered to-day exactly what it is you think I've done. Am I black, or only grey? Do you guess that at the moment I gave myself to you I was already half-promised to another man? I think you must, for surely you realize that if I had been really yours no thief-in-the-night temptation could have taken me from you. But do you know that I accepted you to save myself from the other man, to tie myself like Ulysses to the mast? It was no good, Raphael, was it? I tied myself as tight as I could, but when the siren sang—if I may compare fat old Andy to a siren—all my ropes were no better than Samson's green withes.

"So I've done the conventional thing—I've gone off with a man—so stale a thing that I seem to have done it a hundred times already. It comes quite naturally to me, like swimming to ducks, and throwing things out of the perambulator to babies; it's instinct, handed down from my grandmothers.

Oh, Raphael, you might have saved me. I don't want to be more beastly to you than ever—but you might. You see, my poor splendid young man, you're rather like something in Hymns Ancient and Modern. Besides, though I might have no objection to being your second wife, I've every objection to being your third. You've been married twice; first to a certain Margaret, and then to Margaret's Memory; and though, if we both practised charity, I might be a fairly safe successor to the first, I should stand no chance at all after the second.

"There, I said I'd take all the blame, but I can't—it's too heavy, and the poor donkey's back aches. Oh, Raphael, this isn't going to be for my good—I'm going to suffer for it. But there's just one thing I want to explain to you: I haven't done the worst. I may do it some day, the temptation is all round me, all day and all night—when we canter down the hills and go bumping into the bottoms, and Andy puts his arm around me to steady me on the seat, when we cook our food over a wayside fire and our wooden spoons touch in the pot, when Andy tucks the blanket round me at fog-rising—always, Raphael. And that is why I want you to pray for me. I know your prayers will help me, because you're good—yes, I acknowledge that—too good for me. You shouldn't have let me feel that; that's where you've failed. But I've no right to speak—oh, don't be angry with me! Pray for me! if you can bring yourself to pray for a woman who's done anything so conventional as to run away with a fat man. I trust to your prayers for my safety—not that I'm afraid of Andy; he isn't a devil, and I think I know how to deal with him; the person I'm afraid of is Sally Odiarne—I don't trust myself one atom, but if I could believe you were praying for me, and thinking of me sometimes—then I might creep through the wood somehow. And so—good-bye, my poor splendid young man. I won't tell you where I'm going, I'm not sure myself; but be positive of this—though physically not many miles divide us, spiritually I'm in the Sandwich Islands.

"Sally Odiarne, S.A."

Raphael folded the letter carefully, and put it back into the envelope, while his eyes and his mouth hardened. Sally was right; it had had "the opposite effect."

A little humble note, full of dashes and apologies, would have touched him, but that Sally should make her excuses —or rather lack of excuse—the theme of a literary composition, seemed to him the height of bad taste. Once a novelist, always a novelist, he supposed, but he thought even novelists might be expected to have lucid intervals for the decencies of life.

Odd phrases slipped back into his mind as he crumbled his bread. It seemed at times as if she were actually trying to be funny—and she had compared him to "something in Hymns Ancient and Modern," which was a double bolt, hurled both at him and the book he reverenced. Sally was being cheap.

He leaned his elbows on the table, and for a moment let his despair into his eyes. The weakness did him good; it seemed to relax the cold grip of contempt on his heart. He had been slipping backwards and forwards over Sally for the past five months—now admiring, now despairing, now yearning, now aloof. The last swing of the pendulum had been the fiercest for it had swung him from adoring rapture to disillusioned wretchedness. But at each swing it had touched love, for love was the cedar casket in which it hung; in the earlier slight swings, it had not come near it, but in the great fierce swing from blessedness to despair, it had touched love each side. Some dull, froward, stupid thing in his heart still loved Sally.

After breakfast he went out of doors, thinking that a walk on the Forest would do him good. He was free of Legsheath, the whole day lay before him, and he remembered with agony how he had meant to spend his holidays with Sally, rambling among the blackberries in the lanes, and the heather on the hills. The September summer was still rich; this day, as the others, was of diamond clearness, with a gentle breeze to blow the sweet scent of weed-burn-

ing into the pines; but to Raphael, for the first time, an autumn day was just an autumn day.

He climbed the Forest towards Slumber Wood, his feet almost mechanically taking him over the accustomed track, till he saw the chimney of Isle of Thorns. It seemed like a long finger pointing to the sky . . . a yearning seized him to reconstruct his past. In his old haunts, among the ghosts of old dreams, he would give himself back to the tranquil life he had known before he knew Sally.

He wished he had never met her, so provokingly sweet. For from the first there had been no hope of forgetting her. Even if he had lost before he loved her, there would still have been the memory of his failure to save the poor lamb. He would not have thought so hardly of her then—if he had lost her before he loved her.

There seemed almost a glint of winter in the sunshine that shone among the thorns, and the light and the shadow on the pool were contrasted instead of blended. The cottage was full of dusk, as Raphael passed into it, and the old imprisoned wind rumbled in the chimney. It seemed to him almost as if Isle of Thorns were mourning a loss.

He sat down, for he felt unaccountably weary. He had not walked two miles, and yet both his head and his legs ached. In his neck a little pulse throbbed and throbbed . . . and a strange, stupid thought came to him that it was throbbing for Sally. He took out her letter again, holding it close to his eyes. Some part of his being would always long for her; if his mind forgot her for a moment his body would take up her memory, like this little pulse beating in his neck.

He read the letter again, from the belligerent "And" of its beginning, to its end "Sally Odiarne, S.A."—Silly Ass, he supposed those initials stood for. It was just like her to try to be funny till the last. Then suddenly the thought came to him that perhaps things actually were funny after all, and that he was putting on a long face when he ought to laugh. He laughed now, loud and hilarious, his head against

the wall. For the first time he saw the extreme comicalness of tragedy. If the gods laugh at our sorrows they do so only to set us an example.

What new trick was this of Isle of Thorns? Raphael pulled himself together sharply. His sides ached, and the echoes of his laughter were ringing from the stones and in the chimney with the wind. Somehow his heart had grown softer with that peal, softer and happier, because a soft thing does not break so easily as a hard one. The echoes died, yet he sat upright, as if he still listened; his laughter had placed him on enchanted ground, and he seemed to hear Isle of Thorns pleading for Sally.

She belonged to it, somehow, idiocy and all. It was by that fire she had sat and made him tea, it was into that inner room she had run when he had been too tender of her to follow. She was part of Isle of Thorns in a way that Margaret had never been part—why since he had come he had forgotten all about Margaret. Sally's narrow grey eyes seemed to glance at him from the corners and her mouth to mock him from the shadows—oh, poor, poor little Sally! Where was she now? Alone with a man she did not trust, roofless and homeless with him, without wisdom, with the ache of regrets, and joys that smacked of Babylon.

He had sworn not to save her. Already he had grasped her hand three times, and each time she had pulled it free. It would be a loss of dignity both to him and to her if he pestered her again, and he had an instinctive distrust of any one who made him change his mind so often . . . why, already it seemed as if the pendulum were preparing for another swing.

He looked at the postmark of her letter. Lindfield—that was a village near Haywards Heath. It could easily be reached on the Brighton railway. Probably she was there no longer, but if he made inquiries he might be able to trace her, and, having found her, to win her back. Because he had failed three times, that was no reason for not trying once more. Twice he had said good-bye to her for ever, and

twice they had met again. Was that not an augury that Heaven would not allow their separation? Perhaps it had appointed him her saviour—and here he was, fleeing like Jonah from the presence of the Lord.

He looked anxiously round him, but on all sides were his enemies. The stones, the moss, the chimney, the clear sky in the frame of the door, the thorn-bushes and the pines, all pleaded for Sally. She was so young, she had lost her mother so early, no wonder that morally as well as actually she had become a waif and stray. She had been pushed on prematurely to that change of life when former things have passed away, and the soul stands naked and reckless between a new heaven and a new hell.

It was worth while trying to find her, and there was no one to find her but he. She was alone, without parents or true friends. There was only he. Dare he fail her? More and more the idea was growing upon him that he was meant to be her saviour—else, why had they not been allowed to part? As often as they had said good-bye, they had been flung together again; and probably this parting was no more meant to be final than the other two. He would not force his love upon her, but he could find her, and as hope and daring grew he felt that he could save her. There was so much good in her for him to lay hold of. He remembered how pure she was, in spite of outspokenness, how reverent in spite of flippancy. These qualities would either be the cords with which she was let down into hell or the cords with which he pulled her from the brink.

A kind of horror seized him as he remembered the emotions of the past twenty-four hours. Poor little Sally, how miserably he had failed her—he, her only friend. He could not let her go—Isle of Thorns was telling him that. The task of redemption was laid upon him, and all the ships of Tarshish could not sail him out of the presence of the Lord.

CHAPTER XI

LOVE LAUGHS AT LOGIC

Eliza Huggett was in the dairy, where also sat Neddy, browsing an apple. Raphael came in quickly.

"Eliza, I've made up my mind; I'm going after Miss Odiarne."

"I'm glad of it, dear." She wiped her milky hands, and came over to him.

"You've guessed how things are?" he asked, regardless of Neddy's round eyes.

"I've hoped, Mr. Raphael."

"And do you still hope?"

"Yes, dear, I still hope."

He was surprised at the complete understanding in her eyes, but as he looked out of the window at the wretched slouched form of John Huggett, and then back at his wife, he grew a little wiser.

"I had a letter from her this morning," he said, too deeply touched to linger away from the matter-of-fact; "it's written from Lindfield, and I think that if I went there I might find out where she's gone."

"That's quite likely. There's a train to Haywards Heath leaving East Grinstead at three."

"I expect I could catch it. I should like to start to-day, if possible."

"Yes, dear; I'll put you up a few things in a bag."

Thus briefly it was settled. Raphael had tea and bread and cheese in the kitchen, while Mrs. Huggett packed his bag, and then set off towards the high road.

It was about a quarter to one, and he had five miles to

walk to Forest Row station. It was partly for this reason that he went briskly, partly for the reason that the faster he walked the faster the thoughts ran through his head, so that he had not much time to spend on the realization that he was mad. After Sally had definitely made up her mind, had chosen her path, and staked her all, surely it was madness to expect her to draw back. Luckily his flying legs would not allow this thought to stay in his head long enough to corrupt resolution. It was chased out by a procession of desires, strong yearnings not untinged with remorse, hopes braced by fears, and dreads made dainty by tenderness.

He was passing the group of cottages known as the Kidbrooks when he heard footsteps thudding after him, and as they drew nearer, the sound of panting. He turned round, and saw in a cloud of dust poor little Neddy, half-running, half-walking, his face flushed and covered with sweat.

"Hullo!" he cried amazed.

"Oh, Father, take me with you."

The child's hot hands closed quivering over Raphael's, and his eyes looked up into his face like a little dog's.

"Oh, do take me. I can't stay at home without you."

Raphael was utterly surprised. Neddy had always been an aloof young creature, and had always seemed to regard his father in much the same light as his father regarded him.

"I can't possibly take you with me—I don't even know where I'm going, or how long I shall be away. Besides, you mustn't miss school."

Words were evidently too weak for Neddy's longing, he only stared up more earnestly, and the tears swam into his eyes.

"Come, come," said Raphael, "I mustn't wait here, or I'll lose my train. You will be a good boy, I know, and I'll write you a letter to tell you where I am and everything."

"Oh, please take me with you. I want to help you find Miss Odiarne."

"You can't help me except by obeying me. Go home at once, Neddy, or you'll be late for afternoon school—and,

look, here's a shilling for you—you may spend that on anything you like."

Neddy's eyes grew round with gratitude and wonder. His father had never given him so much as a shilling before; indeed, Raphael was rather staggered by his own extravagance—somehow, Neddy's face had touched him into indiscretion.

"And now, run away home. Come"—putting a touch of sternness into his voice as the child still lingered. "Don't let me have any nonsense, or I shall write and ask Mrs. Huggett to send you to bed early all the time I'm away."

"Good-bye," said Neddy, "and thank you for the shilling."

"Good-bye," said Raphael, "and cheer up."

Thus they parted, the father feeling vaguely uncomfortable all the rest of his way to Forest Row.

Here he took train to East Grinstead, where he had half an hour to wait before he could start for Haywards Heath. He went to the bank, and withdrew some ten pounds odd. The expenses of Sally's stay at Towncreep had been a heavy strain on his purse, and all he had left of that quarter's salary was these few pounds. Hitherto he had tried not to think about his finances, but now he was brought face to face with their scandal.

Lindfield was over two miles from Haywards Heath, where he arrived about half-past three. He found those two miles as wearying as the two miles on the Forest, and was flushed with fatigue when he reached the little village at four. He went straight to the inn, a low white house that seemed to strike the feeling of home into his heart, and had some tea and bread-and-butter at a table in the garden. The first frost of the evening was in the air, discolouring the sky at the rim, and producing an effect of distance even with objects close at hand. The street was empty, scarcely a cart passed down it as he sat there wearily at his food.

The meal revived him, and he resolved to start at once with his inquiries. The first place was the inn. Did the landlady know anything of a man and a girl, travelling to-

gether in a tilt cart, and spending the night in Mockbeggar Wood? She shook her head. She had not seen them, they had not called at The Feathers.

Raphael was immensely discouraged, for he had naturally built his chief hopes on the inn. He was surprised that Andy had not called there for a drink—where else could he have gone? Perhaps he had passed through Lindfield without speaking to a soul.

Such indeed all further inquiries seemed to prove. The only information he could obtain was the way to Mockbeggar Wood, which he sought in the gloaming, as a last resource. It was a small hurst on the road to Ardinglye, about half a mile from the village. The wind crooned in it, and tossed trees across the stars. Raphael had never been inside a wood after dusk, and its eeriness crept into his heart. It was full of mutterings and sighings, full of unexplained movements and sounds, a contrast to the still meadows outside. He trod through the undergrowth, his arm before his face, and came at last to a clearing. Eagerly and reverently he knelt down by the remains of a fire, a burnt patch, with ashes strewn in the grass. It was all that was left to him there of Sally, though he knelt where her foot had been.

The wood seemed full of her, with the ghostly rustle and skip all round him, and he felt near enough to ask her forgiveness for the harshness of a day. He pictured her asleep under those trees that waved their heavy branches over his head—how had she passed that night? Had the danger she dreaded come? Had it stricken her? . . . He clenched his hand fiercely and impotently. How could he tell? He could read no rune in these dead ashes, which were all he had left of Sally.

Thus Raphael rose and left the ghostly little wood. It was now quite dark, and the fold-star was low in the house of the Scales. He had come out some yards further down the road, and opposite him a light streamed from the leaded windows of a cottage. The sound of laughter reached him from within, and as he drew nearer he saw a placard over

the doorway—"Licensed to sell beer and tobacco." It was its nearness to the wood that struck him, otherwise he would not have expected even Baird to drink at this wretched hedge-tavern. The door opened, and a woman came out, her head wrapped in a shawl, and the laughter followed her, with foul words, as she lurched against Raphael at the garden gate.

Instinctively he drew back, hating the idea of questioning such a company. But necessity was upon him, and at last he went in. A fuggy little bar was lit by a lamp that smoked badly, and was in the habit of doing so, to judge by the blackened ceiling. Behind the counter a coarse but good-looking young fellow was talking to some men and a girl with a bandage round her head. Raphael, in his faultlessly cut clothes, with his refined face, and shy fastidious air, at once made every one look round with goggle eyes.

"Great 'eavens! It's the Lord!" shrieked the girl with a laugh.

"And what can I serve you with, Sir?—champagne or liquoors?" asked the barman facetiously.

"It's one of the gospel-engroes wiv tracks," hic-cupped a dusky lad.

Raphael was totally unable to rise to the occasion. He blushed violently, and found it hard not to run away.

"I—I've come to inquire whether a man has called here," he stammered.

"I say, Bill—'as a man ever called 'ere? Such a thing might 'ave 'appened, Sir, but it's always rash to swear, to say nothing of its being unchristian."

Raphael stared round him helplessly. He had no idea what to say to these people; they were a separate order of beings, a gentile nation, and yet he felt that if only he knew how to deal with them they might be able to help him, for they were evidently children of the hedge and road. Luckily for him his eyes at last met the girl's and looked into them imploringly. It was the beauty of his large grey eyes, fringed and bashful as a woman's, that saved him.

"Lord, Jim! don't be hard on the poor feller. He's only an escaped lunatic; just you listen to him politely, and he'll tell you about 'em at Colney Hatch."

Thus encouraged, Raphael began again.

"I'm looking for a man who spent last night in Mockbeggar Wood. He had a girl with him—a lady. I think that he very likely called here, so thought perhaps you might be able to tell me where they've gone."

"That must be Scotchie," said the girl, "Scotchie Baird and his new pick-up."

"Chut!" said the barman, glaring at her.

"His name was Baird," cried Raphael eagerly, "Oh, tell me, for God's sake—do you know where he is?"

"No!" said the barman, "that I don't."

Raphael felt that he was lying, and turned once more to the girl.

"I implore you to tell me all you know—I must find him—I must find the lady who's with him."

"I believe you're sweet on her," said the girl.

Raphael blushed.

"And yet she ran away with fat old Scotchie! Blast me, she must be a fool."

"But tell me where he is"; he was in agony lest the tactics of Stanger's Show should be repeated.

"Well, I'm not certain. But I believe they were making north. I shouldn't be surprised that if you went along to Black Corner or Gazel Sloop you'd come up with 'em."

"Meg, you b—— fool!" cried one of the men.

"Well, why shouldn't I let him know?—poor Lord Almighty!—he's got as sweet a pair of eyes as I ever saw in a man's head. Don't you mind 'em, dear. You go to Black Corner, and cop your girl, my gorgeous one."

Raphael hastily took off his cap to her, and left the beer-house in mingled gratitude to her and horror at her profanity.

He went hot-foot to his inn, and at once asked the land-

lady his best way to Black Corner. Could he get there to-night?

"You'd better take the train to Rowfant, Sir. There'll be a carrier's cart from there."

"And when does the next train go?"

"Not till to-morrow morning. There's a good one at eight from Hayward's Heath."

This was maddening, but Raphael submitted to the inevitable. He would spend the night at The Feathers, and set out the first thing the next morning. So he wrote to Eliza Huggett, telling her of his plans and that she need not expect to hear from him again till he was on his way home. Then he sat down to a supper of eggs and bacon in the little inn parlour.

The refinement and peace of it all was welcome after the beerhouse episode, which still fretted him a trifle. The Feathers was a very decorous inn. The politics of farmers came dimly from the bar; the room in which he sat had texts on the wall, books in the cupboard and dried grasses on the mantelpiece, while a gigantic cactus plant in the middle of the table breathed into Raphael the very breath of aldermanic respectability.

None the less, he did not feel at home, and a nervous longing crept up in his heart for the Towncreep supper table. He took out Sally's letter for company. Each time he read it, it shocked him less; he now even found himself dwelling affectionately over certain parts of it. He still shook his head over his own condemnation—he could not follow her logic and blame his goodness for her badness—and her remarks about Margaret still struck him as execrable taste. None the less, all his hardiness of heart was gone, and he kissed the letter before he put it back into his pocket.

He went to bed early, for he meant to be up with the sun; besides, there was nothing to do after supper. The homesickness was still upon him, more strongly than ever as he lay in the great lonely width of a strange bed, watching a strange hill against the star-strewn sky. The words of a

hymn abhorred of Sally stole soothingly into remembrance—"I am a stranger here, heaven is my home," and he lay repeating them lovingly in his heart till he realized they were Low Church, and substituted something from Hymns Ancient and Modern.

CHAPTER XII

SOME OTHER THINGS THAT LOVE LAUGHS AT

RAPHAEL was awake before sunrise, and, unable to lie in bed with his thoughts, rose immediately, and disconcerted the household with a demand for breakfast. The little parlour was full of cold blue twilight, and through the sash-window a few great stars were still gleaming. He had to grope for his food on the plates, and the cactus was a lump of darkness.

He had soon packed his bag and settled his account; the latter was rather a surprise, with its modest items and presumptuous figures, compelling him to pay away all his odd shillings and break into one of his precious pounds.

However, in spite of all, his spirits were high as he took to the road. The last of the night was gone, though the sunrise had not yet broken into the twilight. Clear as crystal and green as grass, the dawn moved over the pools; the cool, sweet air that baffled his eyes, the tremor of the sky, the pure watery colours of the woods and the roofs, all breathed to Raphael of Genesis—the morning on Eden and Padan-Aram, with the footsteps of the Sons of God still wet on the grass of Shinar.

He found it hard to account for his high spirits. Was it the dawn, or the warmth of his meal, or the race of his blood that made all yesterday's load as a dream? Happy in the mercies of reaction he clattered over the road, whistling frivolously to the waking cottages, while on his left the sunrise piled the sky with gold.

As he passed Horn Reed, it struck him that he heard some one moving on the further side of the hedge, but directly

he stopped the sound ceased. The next minute, however, it started again . . . and prompted partly by curiosity and partly by a sickening and quite insane hope, he climbed the bank and peered through the brambles. At the same time something crashed into a crack-willow bush as if to find shelter. Raphael saw a foot and a torn stocking; he seized it, and the next minute had dragged out Neddy.

For a moment the unlucky father stared at his son in mute astonishment. Neddy had slid down the bank into the road, where he stood, the picture of dirt and destruction. His hair for some reason or other was full of hay, his face smeared with blackberry juice, his jersey and knickers were tattered and greened, his stockings rags, and his shoes ripped.

"Damn!" said Raphael suddenly.

"Oh, Father, that was a real swear," cried Neddy, forgetting his guilt in delight; "what they put 'd—n' for in books."

Raphael blushed. He had meant to say, "You wicked boy, why have you come here? and how have you come here? and how did you get yourself into such a mess?" But the warmth of his feelings had melted all his phrases into one syllable.

"Don't be angry," whimpered Neddy, suddenly realizing the poor foundations of his bliss.

Raphael said nothing, but took his offspring by the hand, and led him a few yards down the road for want of anything better to do.

"How did you get here?" he asked at length.

"I took the train from East Grinstead with your shilling and some pennies of my own, and I looked for you, and I saw you through the window of the inn, eating poached eggs."

"And where did you spend the night?"

"In that old house," and Neddy pointed back at a roofless cottage standing desolate in a field. "I went in, and it smelt all funny—bitter—and there were rats."

"And have you had any breakfast?"

"Yes; blackberries—heaps. I feel sick, in fact."

Raphael stared at him in great alarm. "Oh, Neddy, you naughty boy;" he cried weakly.

He walked on, stiff with perplexity, and with a certain shy pride that Neddy should love him so much.

"Father, you'll let me stay with you?"

"How can I? I can't afford to take you with me about the country; lodgings are dear enough as it is."

"We could sleep in the woods and eat blackberries."

"Indeed we could not."

"Where are you taking me?"

"To the station, to send you back home."

To his horror, Neddy burst into tears.

"Oh, Father, Father, don't. I must come with you, I simply must. Do let me—I'll be so good. I'll carry your bag for you; and I'm sure I shan't cost much. I'll sleep in the stables—anywhere—and I'll eat hardly anything."

"But I can't have you miss school, and certainly you don't deserve such a treat after your disgraceful behaviour."

He spoke sternly, but his heart was rather soft; for the first time he felt the allure of a dirty child.

Then suddenly he was startled by a fact. If he had Neddy with him he might have more power with Sally. He knew how fond she was of the boy; perhaps the sight of him might persuade her, touch her at least. Perhaps in Neddy he was being given a powerful weapon which he would be a fool to throw away. As for expenses, these need not be greatly increased; Neddy could share his room, and his meals would not cost much. Raphael did not like the idea of such close companionship, but his likes and dislikes had no chance when Sally was in question. He stopped in the road, and Neddy, by telepathy or intuition, seemed to know his fate was in the balance, for he stared up almost expectantly into his father's face.

"I—I'm going to take you with me, Neddy. I've changed my mind."

"I thought you would, for I've been asking God to make you."

"Well, I've been thinking that I might manage the extra expense, and that a change would do you good," said Raphael, his teeth on edge at his own mendacity; "but you mustn't think that your disgraceful conduct has persuaded me, on the contrary; and I hope you are ashamed of yourself."

"Oh, yes," said Neddy diplomatically.

"And now we'll walk on quickly and send a telegram to poor Mrs. Huggett, who I expect has been in agonies about you all this time."

They hurried over the mile and a half to Haywards Heath, Neddy limping a little with fatigue and a sore foot. Having sent off his message of assurance, and realizing that his impatience had given him an hour to kick his heels in, Raphael was struck by the expediency of cleaning his bait. He thought first of taking him to a cottage, but recoiled from the probable expense; there must be some secluded pond or stream where grass-stains and blackberry juice could be washed off.

Neddy's filthiness had lost its sudden and inexplicable charm; indeed, he was rather ashamed of his toleration, and escorted him a bit gingerly through the town to where a branch of the Ouse runs by Waste Wood. No half-measures would pass, so Raphael made Neddy strip in the shelter of the trees, and get into the water where it ran shallow by the hatch.

The first sweet warmth had crept into the day, and the scent of new-fallen leaves steamed up from earth and water; a carpet of them was on the stream, near the bank, where no stickle played. Raphael was hot after his exertions, mental and bodily, and felt envious of Neddy's cool nakedness.

"Hurry up," he said. "I should think you'd got it all off now."

"Why don't you come in too, Father? It's ripping."

"You know I can't do that," said Raphael, almost pettishly.

"Why? There's no one looking."

Raphael stared enviously at the cool green water, with the whiteness of his son's limbs seen dimly through it. A mad boyish longing seized him to plunge in, but he was shy of a bathe, even before Neddy.

'You've been in quite long enough," he said dryly. "Come out."

"Oh, don't make me; it's so lovely. Do look at these bubbles! and I can swim in this deeper bit here."

Raphael shook his head at him, but objected no more. It had occurred to him that if he took off his shoes and socks it would cool his legs, and that there was nothing indecorous in wading. However, by such behaviour he put himself into the power of the god who rules these orgies; the sole of his foot touched the water, and if water ever went to a man's head it went at that instant to Raphael's.

"I'm coming, Neddy!" he cried, loud enough for any one to hear at Waste Farm, and the next moment there was another pile of clothes on the bank and another shameless heathen in the brook.

"Oh, how splendid!" shrieked Neddy, at Raphael's dripping head and shoulders, "let's go down to where it's deep and swim ever so far."

Regardless and graceless they climbed over the hatch, paddling through the leaves that strewed the shallow waters of the weir, and sliding down to where the pool was deep, with the current running through it, and crisp bubbles bursting against the branches of a willow.

Neddy had never seen his father unbend so completely. Somehow, Raphael without his clothes was a different being from Raphael with them on, a being one could splash and kick, round whose slippery shoulders one could fling one's arm. Those two had never been so near to each other as that morning, naked in the Ouse, and their laughter had soon flung away the loosest trammels of discretion.

. . . " 'Ullo, my young Apollers!"

Raphael swung round from an attempt to pick a branch off the weir with his feet, and splashed back into deep stream

at the sight of a spectator. On the bank stood a Person, tall, meagre, disreputable, but properly equipped with an umbrella.

" 'Ullo, my young Greek gawds—and wot do you think you're doin'?—'avin' a wash? S'welp! but you've made the water dirty."

Raphael, as was his custom when addressed by tramps, made no reply. "Come, Neddy, don't stare at him like that," he muttered hastily.

"No, no—don't you take no notice of me, my white-skinned blessin's. You splash about in yer nice barf till they come along from Waste and 'ave yer copped for trespassin'. Good luck to yer, my angel spirits."

The Person shuffled off through golden clumps of tansy. Neddy stared after him with something like admiration.

"What funny names he called us! Is he drunk?"

"I expect so," said Raphael; and they swam and waded down stream till a sudden dam of rusty kettles and saucepans proclaimed the neighbourhood of Waste Farm.

"I think we'd better go back now. It must be getting on for nine, and it'll take us quite half an hour to dress and get to the station."

Accordingly they turned up stream, and climbed the weir, wet and warm, to where their clothes lay by shallow water. The pile did not look exactly as before; it lacked the white gleam of linen, and close to it was a piece of paper in the fork of a stick.

The next moment Raphael and Neddy were kneeling on the grass, with staring, horror-filled eyes. The boy's clothes were as before, in their grubby disarray, but in the place of Raphael's brown summer tweed was a mass of ragged corduroy, and instead of his shirt was a sleeveless garment of flannelette, showing suspicious signs of having once been a woman's nightgown. On the paper in the fork of the stick was written—"Exchange is no Robbery."

"Do you think he meant it for a pun?" asked Neddy in an awestruck voice.

Raphael said nothing, but his eyes wandered agonizedly among the dead leaves, tansy and rattle, looking for his watch, his bag—both gone.

"Oh dear!" he cried faintly at last.

"Aren't you going to swear again, Father?"—and Neddy's face fell.

Raphael thrust his fingers through his hair, while in his mind he worked a hideous addition sum—

	£	s.	d.
One tweed suit	5	5	0
One light overcoat	2	10	0
One pair brown boots	1	5	0
Shirt, socks, etc., say	1	0	0
And, oh, his watch!	7	10	0

He had scarcely reached the total when he remembered his bag and its contents, working out to another two or three pounds. His entire losses must amount to nearly twenty pounds, and everything would have to be bought again, except his watch, that dear vanity which represented the economies of two years.

"Father, don't you think you'd better put something on?" Neddy's voice recalled him to the decencies of life, but before him was only a pile of tatters.

"You'll have to wear his clothes," chuckled Neddy; then, catching sight of the low corners of his father's mouth, "I expect you'll soon catch him, and get your own things back."

"I must go to the police station at once," and Raphael heroically picked up the flannelette garment, and after a desperate search for the right entrance, put it on.

Neddy's conduct was valorous, for only slight twitchings betrayed him as he watched his father slip his long white legs into those abominable trousers, and his arms into the ragamuffin coat. The hat and the umbrella he discarded contemptuously.

"You really look rather nice," said the boy, "like a gipsy, you know; and your neck's ripping without a collar."

Moore said nothing, drearily, and they left the wood. A pair of boots two or three sizes too large, with soles two inches thick and split uppers, are not a help to brisk walking, and Raphael had visions of losing his train. One thing was now certain—he could not afford to take Neddy with him, and to his surprise he found himself disliking the idea of sending him back. That last half-hour was wonderfully gracious in his memory, in spite of its comic-paper ending, and he was touched by the child's present sympathy, expressed by a wriggling hand in his, and later and more poignantly by unexpected meekness in the face of his doom.

"Have you really lost twenty pounds? It was a pity you gave me that shilling."

Raphael groaned, for as he looked down at Neddy's disreputable figure, he realized that it was not for himself only that new clothes would have to be bought, and that soon.

The village policeman did not give him much comfort. Indeed, he found himself greeted at first with distrust and then with ill-concealed derision. That a man should be fool enough to leave his belongings unwatched within a hundred yards of the Brighton road, struck Constable Hobday as less tragic than contemptible. He did not hold Raphael out much hope of seeing his own again; a hedgerow theft was always the most difficult kind to trace. However, he took his name and address and offered him the loan of a pair of boots, so that he might have some reasonable chance of catching his train.

"You might have let the poor lad have your old coat and trousers, too," said his wife; "a lamentable pickle he's in wud them cords."

"A nice 'un you are! It was pretty soft of me to lend my boots to a fool like that—and how do I know that the whole thing ain't a plant?"

Thus Raphael started, all unconscious, on a career of disrepute. He and Neddy walked briskly towards the station.

"Now," he said to the boy, "I shall give you eighteenpence for your ticket back to Forest Row, and you must tell Mrs. Huggett everything that's happened, and that she must send me some clean shirts and things, and my blue serge suit, to the inn at Black Corner, and——"

He stopped abruptly, stood stock still, and faced Neddy. His son stared up into his face, watching it pale under its olive swarthiness, while his eyes grew large and imploring, and his hands fumbled quivering in his pockets.

"Neddy!" he cried, "I've lost it all."

"All what?"

"The money—nine pounds, seven shillings and fourpence. Oh, Neddy!"

The boy had no tongue to speak, he had caught his father's plague of blank concern.

"It must have been in the pocket of the coat that man took," ventured Sherlock Holmes at last.

"Of course it was! and it was all I had. I shan't get another penny till next quarter."

There was a fresh silence between them, during which was heard the whistle of the Rowfant train.

"What can I do?" asked poor Raphael almost imploringly of the child.

"Walk home and ask Mrs. Huggett for some money—she always has heaps."

"Indeed, she hasn't—but," as common sense slowly returned, "I might telegraph."

"Yes, telegraph," said Neddy, anxious to be reassuring.

Raphael, however, still remained motionless, watching his train as it slid along the embankment, the sunshine gleaming on its windows. Then he went and sat under the hedge, Neddy crouching beside him, subdued and helpless.

In the first flush of tragedy he found it hard not to blame every possible cause, immediate or remote—Sally, but for whom he would never have journeyed, Neddy, but for whom he would never have bathed. However, the claims of the future were too fierce for him to waste time over

the past. What was now to be done? He had lost his train, and it would probably be a long time before there was another stopping at Rowfant—besides, he had no money. What was to be done? "Go home, and give it all up," was the first suggestion of despair. So far his quixotry had resulted in nothing but catastrophe and farce—let him turn home before his ruin was complete.

His loss was being brought home to him by time in stronger detail, and its items staggered him. He had lost all his money, his watch, and some twelve pounds worth of clothes; and he had still before him the prospect of heavy expenditure —he remembered his bill at The Feathers. He could not go a step further without borrowing from Eliza Huggett, and he would have to buy himself new clothes—ready-made, he supposed with a grimace. It was not likely that he would come up with Sally at Black Corner; he would have to chase her half across the country, running up endless bills at exorbitant inns, with the prospect of returning home alone, a failure.

Neddy was conscious of the misery at his side, and crept up closer, at last allowing his head to drop on Raphael's shoulder, where, weary after a wakeful night and a bathe in stream water, he slept. His father scarcely noticed him, he was too busy with his own sore problems.

. . . "Like a bit o' bread?"

The words made him lift his head from his hand, to see a ragged girl and a woman standing in the road in front of him. It was the girl who had spoken.

"No, thank you," he said.

"Don't want nothing?—not for the kid?"

"No, thank you."

"Well, well, we must be moving on. Wish yer good luck, young man."

She smiled kindly, and they dragged off in their unwieldy boots. Raphael stared after them. He was struck by the contrast of these people's attitude to him now he was in rags with the secretive insolence of the days he had walked

among them in decency and decorum. Perhaps after all there were kind hearts about, repelled by his respectability. . . .

Then suddenly a new thought shot into his mind. Would he not run a better chance of finding Sally if he sought her just as he was, in his uncleanness, in his rags, a friend of outcasts and heathen? The idea came to him as lunatic ideas come to every man, but it tarried longer. He had had lunatic ideas before, but this one was more than a mere flash of Bedlam. He found it taking up its dwelling in his brain, arranging his other thoughts to suit itself, actually forcing its mad premises on him as reasonable.

He had come out to seek Sally—she needed him, he was her only friend, and if he turned back from her now she would be alone indeed. And yet he could not go forward in the old way without a terrific tangle of debt—and all the time he would be moving as it were on the wrong road, the respectable frequenter of inns and holder of railway tickets, whereas the girl he loved and was seeking drank her glass in hedge-taverns with the sore-footed trampers of the dust.

Sitting there, in the white glare of the road, he realized that he had forgotten one of the most vital principles of redemption. He had set out to redeem Sally without understanding that the redeemer must put himself on the same level as the redeemed. It is little use trying to save a drowning man from the bank—one must go boldly into the water. So it was no good trying to save Sally from the respectable vantage of The Feathers inn and a ticket to Rowfant; he must go down to her in the deep waters of dereliction, eat dusty bread, and sleep under the stars.

But could he do it?—continue to wear these disgusting clothes, drag these great boots over the white miles, to lie at length in some barn or ruined hovel, hungry and alone? Raphael fairly gasped at the discoveries he was making, for he realized that not only did he believe in the necessity of this renunciation but that he welcomed it. Into his heart, frothy and thick, foamed the beer-broth of adventure. He threw back his head and laughed silently—oh the merry

wildness of it all!—the novelty, the romance, the success!

After that he considered the plan more calmly. From a financial point of view it was excellent—he could easily earn a few pence to buy himself food. And he would take Neddy with him—that too would be economy, for Neddy in the lanes would cost less than at Towncreep. Besides, he knew that he had not underestimated the boy's power with Sally; in sending him home he deprived himself of a tool—and something of a comrade in the dark lanes. Raphael looked down on the sleeping head which had fallen to his knee; yes, the child had his good points, though he did not feel so drawn to him as when their bare legs and arms had twisted together in the stream.

He wondered what Sally would say when he came to her at last, in his rags, with his rough hair and his weary legs. It would not be so hard to trace her now that he was one with the liars who kept her secrets. How petty and blundering his former methods seemed! It was a pity he had not thought of this plan until tragedy, or rather farce, had forced it into his brain—but he would not encourage the regretful mood.

"Wake up, Neddy," and he shook the boy's arm.

Neddy opened his round eyes, like an animal's in their waking.

"Oh, Father, I was dreaming about you and Miss Odiarne—I dreamed we were in the house where I slept last night, and she had fallen through into a great well under the floor, and first of all you tried to pull her out from above, but you couldn't, so you had to go down to her—right down into the dark."

"Oh, Neddy!—what a coincidence!" Raphael's eyes brightened, and then sobered. Had his thoughts then been so fierce as to have troubled his child's sleep?

"But that isn't all," continued the boy, "for when you'd got down, you found that it wasn't really the bottom, and there was another pit under the first one—going right down into—h-hell."

CHAPTER XIII

"NOTHING FOR NOTHING"

THE air was thick and throbbing with the noonday when Raphael and Neddy started; the sun beat down upon their heads, both bare, and they could feel the heat of the dust through their boots. Neither, however, was much inclined to notice the discomforts of the morning. Raphael was in the first boil of adventure, and Neddy was humbly hugging his change of fate. For the last two hours his destiny had chopped like a north-east wind—it was one of Sally's weak points, according to Raphael, that she was always making him change his mind.

Matters seemed fairly fixed now, however. Lady Poverty had been embraced by a life-long acquaintance, though, hitherto, not a cordial admirer, and the Brighton road was slipping away under two pairs of dust-white boots. They walked through Lindfield again, past the little white inn, with its green blinds drawn down in the sunshine, but allowing Raphael a glimpse of the cactus plant—respectability's last wail.

Just beyond Lindfield was a sign-post with Rowfant on both arms, with the difference that it was nine miles by the high road and seven by the lane. They accordingly turned down the lane, not sorry to leave the glare and the frequent cottages. On either side were woods, tossed heaps of colour —Turner-patches of red and yellow, welded with summer's last riot of green and winter's first bleak brown. The hedges were full of purple sloes and blackberries, and it occurred to Raphael that it was time to have a meal. He was glad that his roadstering had fallen in the days of free fruit, just

as he was glad it had fallen in the days of free warmth and late candle-lighting. He and Neddy trailed along the hedges, tearing their tatters on the brambles, leaving samples of the pink flannelette shirt all along the rim of Waters Wood. They gathered warm handfuls and pressed them into their mouths, regardless of stained faces. Raphael could not help feeling he must be drunk—drunk with the mad water of a Sussex stream—so strange was, not so much his conduct, as the way in which he regarded it. He actually felt the comfort in that thick heat of scanty clothing, and the recklessness of having nothing on to spoil and no economies to make was trickling faster and faster into his head. After all, he was young, only thirty-two, and his nature had never had full or fair play. Ten years of youth were owing him—wasted in an early marriage, early bereavements, early responsibilities—and were now being paid him by Pan over the counter of the hedge.

But, alas! Raphael, too, had something to pay for—nothing less than his famous blackberry meal. In his innocence of road life he had thought that to feed oneself, one has only to fill one's stomach. The latter is often pretty simple, but the former is not to be done on blackberries. During that wretched hour in which he dragged himself over something less than two miles, he realized the fatuousness of those lyrics in which wayfarers live on woodland largesse, berries and filberts, and the tart dew-washed apple.

He still felt the need of food, and yet in his throat and stomach was a peculiar gorged sensation which made loathsome the mere sight of a bramble bush. He had occasionally wondered why tramps begged for bread in blackberry time—now he understood. Neddy, lucky wretch, was sick, but Raphael having passed the age of such easy relief, had to pull himself along as best he might. A little stream runs through the flats by Egypt Farm, and here they were obliged to rest—stretched on the grass, with the shadows of the trees growing longer. Raphael slept a little, and when he woke there was a blessed smack of coolness in the air.

He sat up and wondered what time it was. He was not used to telling the time without his watch. His love of the country was more æsthetic than practical—the sun, as far as he was concerned, was there for galliard risings and dreamy settings, no more to tell the hour by than a dandelion clock. He realized that he was not so well suited for a mumper's life as he had supposed. He could not read the face of the sky, and he had miscalculated the bounties of the hedgerow. By the way, where was his next meal to come from? He had troubled little about food, counting on what could be had for the picking. Now he was confronted by the problem of earning his supper—and how was he to earn it?

He woke up Neddy, and they set out again. It was certainly much colder, for though the air was still as a pond, the frost was already in it, cooling the roads faster than any wind. It was a typical autumn day, sinking from heat into chill; Raphael and Neddy both shivered though they walked briskly, and their breath was like smoke on the air that smelled of burning leaves.

They passed the cottages known as Tiboles, and the sun slid down behind the high mist wall that lay along the horizon. Then the stars shone out above it, and it spread over the water-meadows, and crept into the woods. It must be about six o'clock, and the sign-post still declared two miles to Rowfant. All the cottages they passed seemed to be burning leaves, for the blue smoke poured out of their gardens, sweeter than myrrh, and mingled with the mists. The fogs were in the high fields now, with the sheep ghostly among them, and the roofs of barns and the tops of haystacks above them, and above these the first faint glimmer of the Waterman.

The dusk had not yet touched night when they came to Rowfant, a few dark houses with a yellow moon looking over their gables. Villages at twilight always had for Raphael a peculiar thrill; even if it was the dreary street of Uckfield with its new shops and glare of acetylene gas, the mingling of dusk and moonlight washed it with the gentlest rain of

dreams. The Rowfant villagers were mostly at their supper, and passing up the echoing empty street, Raphael and Neddy saw tables laid, and lamplight streaming over cheerfulness and bread. They were both very tired and hungry, but both held their tongues, for the father was resolved to reach Black Corner that night, and the son to prove himself a man.

"Black Corner—2 miles," read the sign-post beyond the village inn—just such another as The Feathers at Lindfield, respectable and dear. Raphael squared his shoulders; he was ashamed of having taken so long over seven miles, but the policeman's boots were beginning to hurt him, and he was faint for a meal. How was he to get one? He felt helpless and useless, the Professor's private secretary, unable to dig, to beg ashamed. He remembered a story he had once heard of a man who walked from Guildford to Carlisle, and paid his way by singing outside public-houses. The bare idea froze Raphael—never, never would he stoop to such ignominy, he would rather go honourably without bread.

Neddy was dragging at his hand a bit, and limping on his sore foot. His father experienced a pang at having brought him, but a glance down at the child's face showed him that he was happier than over his warm broth at Towncreep. He wondered if he would find Sally at Black Corner—he thought not, but he would probably find out where she had gone. He had met no mumpers on his walk through the byways, but he expected to fall in with some now he was on the high road, and perhaps they would be able to give him news.

At last they came to the cross-roads on the Surrey border, where an inn looks over the fields of two counties. It was quite dark, and a kind of fear came upon Raphael at the lonely throws.

"Are we going to have supper here?" asked Neddy.

"Does it look like it?" said his father sharply; the sudden sense of desolation had tried his temper.

Not a soul was about, and though a cheerful light streamed

through the curtains of the bar parlour, the inn was silent. Raphael walked a little way along the north road which leads up into the huddling woods of Surrey, then he came back into Sussex, and walked along the eastern road as far as Boarzell, then returned to the throws. He had hoped to see, as at Lindfield, some kind of hedge-tavern where he could inquire, but none was to be found. The place seemed deserted, and he felt wretched and helpless. He had been quite prepared not to find Sally when he reached Black Corner, but he had expected news of her, and now there was none. Where had she gone? North, south, east or west? A white ghostly road led each way.

Neddy trotted meekly after his father, though he limped with weariness. He made no protest at their aimless rambling, for he dreaded lest he should be sent home. How Raphael was to manage it he was not quite sure, but he was used to regarding that quiet being as omnipotent in his punishments.

They were on the western road, looking south over dark fields dotted with tiny lights. There was no mist on the high grounds, and the moon was bright in the house of the Ram.

"What's that?" said Neddy, pointing to a little flicker against some trees.

"I believe it's a fire," said Raphael and they walked towards it.

Before they had gone far he realized that it must be a gipsy encampment, for dark beings crouched round the light, and close at hand were a tent and a tilt-cart hung with mops and baskets.

"I'll go and speak to them," said Moore; "stay here, Neddy,"—for, remembering the Lindfield tavern, he was doubtful as to the fitness of their language for his son's ears.

Gulping down his nervousness, he came into the glow, and great dark eyes stared at him inscrutably out of women's faces. No one spoke, and Raphael licked his dry lips in panic.

"Do you know anything of a man called Andrew Baird? —Scotchie?" he added, seized with a bright thought.

The women shook their heads.

"We don't keep with the gaujos," said one of them. She spoke neither the Sussex nor the Cockney he associated with the roads; she had a slightly foreign accent, and her low sing-song reminded him of wind in a chimney.

"He used to be with Stanger's Show," said Raphael despairingly, "he kept the rifle-range."

"Stanger's at Wittering," said another woman.

"But he's not with it. He and a girl were alone, in a tilt-cart like yours."

The women still shook their heads, and Raphael began to wonder whether his rags had been as successful as he had hoped. However, it was more than likely that they really did not know. After all, the whole population of the roads was not bound to be in league with Andy Baird. He turned miserably away, conscious that he had failed. All his seekings, all his losings, had brought him no further than a dark cross-roads on the Surrey border, without a hand to point his way.

He was just going back to Neddy, when a horse and cart turned the bend of the road.

"There's Ambrose," said the first woman, "maybe he can tell you something. He often drinks with the gaujos."

Raphael waited, relieved at the idea that these people were not deliberately lying, and the next moment Ambrose drove up in another tilt-cart, with a long-legged horse tied to the back.

He jumped down, a neat foreign-looking little figure rather showily dressed, and talked to the women for some time in a mixture of Romany and English, evidently discussing the horse he had bought. At last one of the women asked him a question, in answer to which he turned full on the stranger.

"Who's it you're looking for?"

"Andrew Baird—Scotchie—of Stanger's Show."

Ambrose scratched his head.

"Was he at Black Corner this morning?"

"He was here a little while ago, I think, but I don't know when."

"Because there was a feller from Stanger's at the Prince of Wales this morning, drinking with his girl. I seldom speaks to gaujos, but I thought this one was going to buy my horse, and he said he knew my cousin, Savaina Carew, who dukkers in Sussex."

"And did he tell you where he was going?" Raphael's voice came thick with mingled anxiety and relief.

"He means to join Stanger's over at Wittering in a day or two, but he's at Billingshurst to-night, for he asked me whether Hammers Wood was good for a pitch. That's all I knows about him, and I shouldn't know so much if I hadn't thought he was going to buy that horse of mine. I don't often speak to gaujos, except when I thinks they want to buy horses."

He evidently did not credit Moore with such a wish, for he turned on his heel with a "good evening," and whipped into the tent. Raphael hurried back to Neddy, and bore patiently with his fractious waking in the warmth of his good news. He had no doubt that the couple at The Prince of Wales had been Sally and Andy, and as he now knew not only their wayside pitch but their journey's end, he felt sure of finding them soon. He laughingly pictured his failure if he had arrived at Black Corner in the train, in his good clothes, his bag in his hand, his supper and his room awaiting him at the inn. Those women would have stared at him sullenly out of their inscrutable eyes, that man would have lied to him, those children would have plagued him for "a penny, gentleman." It was almost cheerfully that he faced the prospect of a supperless and roofless night.

It was as well that he had this sustenance of heart, for his bodily circumstances were hard enough. It was now quite late, and the inn at the cross-roads was shut. Raphael looked round for somewhere to sleep; he was utterly worn

out, and knew that he could not go a step further without rest. Food was out of the question.

"We can't have any supper to-night, Neddy," he said, as if the occurrence were tame through repetition, "but to-morrow I'll get work and earn some money."

"What sort of work?" asked Neddy, practical even in his drowsiness.

Raphael said nothing, but dragged his son along the eastern road to where the roof of a barn showed over the hedge. He found himself opposite a cart-shed, fairly sheltered and quite dry. There was a harvest wagon at the farther end, and into this he climbed with Neddy. The latter was heavy with sleep, and nearly wept when his father reminded him of the dues of Providence. But on this point Raphael was always inexorable, and poor little Neddy had to stumble through as many of the prayers in *The Children's Altar-Book* as survived in his supperless memory, before he was allowed to sink a tousled heap upon the boards of the cart.

Raphael prayed too, full of thankfulness for plain sailing. Hungry as he was, he scarcely felt his pangs in the assurance of victory. What gave it to him it would be hard to say—a head light with hunger and weariness, perhaps.

He had never spent a night in a barn before, or he would have been not so surprised that he could not sleep. Rats skipped among the cartwheels and rustled in the thatch, and now and then he thought he heard footsteps, and started up, only to face the empty moonlight. Even Neddy at his side disturbed him, and every half minute the wind would sweep across the fields to the shed, and the distant boom of its starting, with the hiss of it on the thatch, seemed to whisper—"Billings-hurs-s-st. Billings-hurs-s-s-st."

He guessed that Sally must be there that night, and his fancy made the wind a messenger between them, sweeping up towards the north from the woods where she slept—"Billings-hurs-s-st—Billings-hurs-s-st." He wondered if she thought of him. If she did, she pictured him in his room at Towncreep Farm—she little knew that for her sake he lay

ragged and hungry in a harvest-cart. A kind of tremor passed over him, half happy, half afraid. There are moments when a man's God seems to hold him in the hollow of His hand and mock him tenderly. Raphael had thought that his life-story was finished; he had looked back on love and on sorrow, and he had seen how they had shaped his soul. Now he was beginning to find out that what he had taken for the story was merely the prologue, and that he had love and sorrow still to face, but a more yearning love and a more burning sorrow. For he had known what it was to love the strong and sorrow for the dead, but now he loved the weak and sorrowed for the living.

CHAPTER XIV

"DAMN LITTLE FOR SIXPENCE"

"FATHER, a lady's given me a piece of bread and butter."

The words and the waking they brought were Raphael's only intimation that he had been asleep. He sat up in the cart, stiff and cramped in every limb, his teeth chattering, his arms hugging his breast in the bitter cold.

Neddy was on the floor of the shed, devouring like a little wolf a piece of bread and butter.

"Oh, Father, it's so good," he spluttered with his mouth full, "and the lady says that if you come she'll make you a cup of tea."

"What lady?" asked Raphael, in his right mind at last. "Child, you haven't been begging!"

"No, but I got up to explore, and I smelt a fire, and there was a lady and gentleman making tea."

Raphael was exceedingly annoyed; he felt that Neddy had proved himself unable to bear the throes of hunger like a gentleman. He got up, and climbed slowly and rheumatically out of the cart. Never in his life had he felt such cold. It was like walking through cold water—that walk across the meadow, to which he was prompted by the sadly mixed motives of a desire to apologize for his son's rudeness, and the memory of the lady's offer of some tea.

Not realizing the elasticity of a child's language, he expected some camping party with a bell-tent, patent stove, and folding beds. He was surprised to find the lady and gentleman coaxing a fire on a strip of wayside grass, the latter in a dirty suit of cords, with a squashed bowler, the for-

mer in a green stuff dress, a plaid shawl, and half a Merry Widow hat.

"Hullo, kid!" she called cheerily, "brought your daddy?"

"I hope my little boy hasn't been troubling you," said Raphael, a trifle confused.

"Not he! Bless him! . . . And now, what'll you take, young man? A cup of tea with a drop in it? The kid says you've been dossing in that shed last night, as empty as drums."

The steam of the tea rose invitingly to Raphael's blue pinched nose, as he stood hugging himself by the fire. But he remembered that he must practise what he preached.

"No, thank you," he said lamely.

"Come along, dear, don't be shy. There's plenty more where that came from."

She held out the cup to him with a grin, and he found his numb hands creeping round it, while the steam thawed his face. After that he was not much surprised to find himself sitting on a pile of rags and talking quite cordially to his new acquaintances. The tea was delicious, though—perhaps because—like all wayside tea it contained a "drop," and after the tea came bread and margarine, sweet as grapes to him that morning.

It occurred to him that these people might be able to tell him the road to Billingshurst.

"Billingshurst—why, that's on our way, ain't it, Launcelot?"

"I believe so, Henrietta. Leastways, we'll slope along there, as I hear there's a b—— good doss in them parts."

"Mr. Cortelyon and I are going to Petersfield," said the woman, collecting her crockery and various rags of which Raphael found it hard to imagine the use, and stuffing them into a perambulator. "We go there regular every winter—it's the best house in England."

"What house?" asked Raphael innocently.

"Workhouse, of course. We go there every winter. Mr. Cortelyon says it's that what's made our married life so b——

happy. We get a divorce every winter—scarce see each other for six months—and then come together in the spring like bride and bridegroom."

Mr. Cortelyon laughed immoderately at this reminder of his own wit, but said nothing.

"Well, I was thinking, young man," continued his wife, "that as you're for Billingshurst and not sure of the way, we might go that far together. I likes your company, I does. I can tell you've seen better days, and not so long ago, neither. Mr. Cortelyon and I are most b—— particular as to the company we keeps; we too have seen better days. You'd be surprised, young man, if I was to tell you the sphere we've moved in and the people we've shaken hands with. You'd say no wonder we don't care to muck along with rag, tag, and bobtail."

Raphael considered her offer. He was rather frightened at the idea of walking fifteen or sixteen miles with a man and woman so careless about their adjectives; besides he was infinitely shy of this unknown homeless race—he had hitherto found it difficult enough to speak to them, ask them the simplest questions, and now he would have to maintain free intercourse, familiar association. He squirmed at the thought. On the other hand, he did not know the way to Billingshurst, and shrank from the prospect of futile wanderings. These people might be of material service to him, too; they might initiate him into the freemasonry of the roads, bring him into contact with tramps who had heard of Sally, help him to trace her beyond Billingshurst.

These considerations were able to cope with the riotings of prejudice, and Raphael closed with Mrs. Cortelyon's offer, to the huge delight of Neddy, who had been seized with an abrupt and inexplicable infatuation for her husband; and a quarter of an hour later, all four were tramping through the morning coolness.

It was going to be a glorious day—the roadside trees whispered to an amiable wind, and crisp cold sunlight bathed fields and farms. Raphael was surprised when Mrs. Cor-

telyon told him that this was the very worst time of year for tramping.

"It's the days are so hot and the nights so cold; and if you gets into a muck of sweat at noon it's enough to kill you if you're freezing before six. Give me all cold or all hot, none of your b—— half and halfs."

"I wonder," said Raphael, blushing deeply, "whether you would be so kind as not to use that—that word before my little boy. I don't want him to pick up—er—unsuitable language."

"Why, of course, dear—that's to say if I can remember. But there's no use bringing a kid on the roads unless you don't mind what he learns. How long have you been taking him about?"

"Not long."

"I thought not. Oh, there's a lot about you I'd like to ask, young chap. But I never asks questions. Folks on the roads sometimes don't like to be asked how they got there."

Her tone was so kindly that Raphael ventured to give her at least a general idea of his quest, in hopes that she might know something about Baird and Sally. But Mrs. Cortelyon shook her head.

"Never heard of 'em. I've heard of Stanger's, of course, but never met anybody belonging to it. Launcelot and me don't come from these parts. We've been tramping in the North till a year ago, when we was sent to Petersfield Union. Launcelot was born in Petersfield, you know, and we got sent on there from Oldham—which was luck and no mistake. We've never been to any other Union since, 'cept in spike. You take my advice, dear, and leave your girl to her fancy, and come along with us to Petersfield. Maybe they won't let you stay there long—you'll be shipped off to your own parish—but it will be worth your while to see what it's like. Cooking first-class, beer at your Christmas dinner, and young ladies reading to you in the afternoons, and getting up concerts and things. I don't envy the King in his royal paliss when I'm in Petersfield Workhouse."

The day grew warmer as they came to Roughey Street—the dust lay on the hedges, and the apples of wayside orchards were white with it. The sounds in the farms and fields reminded Raphael of the necessity to get work, but both Mr. and Mrs. Cortelyon shook their heads.

"You ain't got the muscle," said the latter, feeling his arm; "the harvest's done now, and I don't see what else you'd be good for. Farmers ain't such softies as you'd think. 'Tain't often as they takes tramp labour, 'cept for hopping. No, my old dear, the only trade for road folks, if they don't tinker, and ain't got crocks to sell, is frightening women, and Mr. Cortelyon and me don't hold with that, and nor'ull you if you're a gentleman."

Raphael suggested a doubt as to where his next meal was to come from, but Mrs. Cortelyon received it with derision.

"Why, from us, of course. You'll muck along with us till we come to Billingshurst. By that time, maybe, you'll have picked up a copper or two; I've never known a day go by but Launcelot and me haven't got something from somewhere."

Her prophecy was literally fulfilled, for soon after they had crossed the eastern flap of St. Leonard's Forest, and were plodding in the dust of white-hot Thunder's Hill, Raphael picked up a sixpence. It lay by the roadside, shining and sun-warm, and Raphael seized it with glistening eye. There were scruples at first as to the moral value of the adage "Finding's keeping," but his companions' metaphysics and his own realization of the difficulty of finding the rightful owner, persuaded him at last to transfer the precious coin to his pocket, with the resolve to drop sixpence in the road whenever he could afford it.

"That'll pay for your doss and the kid's at Billingshurst," said Mrs. Cortelyon, "and leave tuppence for supper and breakfast—you'll have to lie in the double room, for it's threepence each in the singles, and it 'ud be a waste to spend all your money on beds. The doubles ain't heaven, by no means, but what can you expect—'Nothing for nothing and damn little for sixpence' is a precious true motter."

The last half of it hardly struck Raphael as precious true. The damn lot one could get for sixpence fairly dazzled him, and to the end of his life he regarded the coin with a kind of superstitious reverence.

The Cortelyons left the high road at Gibshaven, and as soon as they were comfortably in the bye-lanes, halted for a meal. Moore realized that he was travelling with sybarites, for there was more tea, with more drops in it, and bread and margarine to the point of surfeit. It was extraordinary what his morning had done for him. He found himself laughing and talking with the Cortelyons as if he had always known them and always worn their rags. The little wayside scene was no leaf torn from a strange book, but something familiar and sweet, even to the sharing of cups. Now and then something in his heart would bid him get up and look at himself from the outside, but he always spurned the summons. The warm humanity that made him love these mumpers and their meal, and pull Neddy against his side, was too sweet to be lost, even in exchange for decorum. There was rather an absence of the latter that noon, he felt, as he lay sprawling on the grass, but somehow he seemed to do very well without it, and when Mrs. Cortelyon said, "Come, take off your pants, dear, and let me see if I can't put 'em in a stitch or two," he was both grateful and obedient.

The afternoon was more trying. It was very hot, and both Raphael's and Neddy's feet were blistered. A thundery steam was in the air, and the rumble of distant thunder came from where the black clouds lay behind Warning Lid; but the storm passed eastward, and not a drop fell to cool the dust.

Raphael found himself falling into the peculiar slouching step of Mr. and Mrs. Cortelyon, which he had hitherto derisively known as the Weary Willy Walk, but of which he now appreciated the advantages. The weight of the body, bent slightly forward, seemed to carry the legs along, and the bent knees relieved the pressure on blistered soles. Before they had reached Wolderingfold Neddy was so tired that he

made no objections to being packed into the perambulator, and wheeled like a baby for the last six miles.

They found a garish sunset behind Billingshurst, when they came down on it from Great Shepherds and Pudding-cake. The sky was smeared with long scarlet streamers, the first of winter's advancing host, and the fires moved over the windows, the roofs and the ponds. Mr. and Mrs. Cortelyon walked up the street as far as a low-eaved house, just beyond the church. "Make sure of your doss first," they said when Raphael asked about Hammers Wood. But he was too impatient, weary as he was. Who knew but that Sally and Andy had spent the day at Billingshurst, and would leave it at dusk for a moonlight drive? The matter was finally settled by Mr. and Mrs. Cortelyon agreeing to take Neddy into the Travellers' Rest, and arrange about beds and food, while Raphael went straight to the wood, which was only a few yards further down the road.

As he drew near it he saw a tent among the trees, and a sick heartrending hope sprang up in him. But as he crashed through the underwood a strange woman with a child at her skirts came out, and in the clearing he saw some fellows tinkering kettles. He asked them his usual string of questions, with that usual betrayal of himself which roused the women's interest. They gathered round him, a dusky, dirty, but not unfriendly swarm, and their answer was what Mrs. Cortelyon would have called a "b—— half and half." A man and a girl had been in the wood before them, with a tent and a cart; they were packing up to go when the others arrived, about six or seven hours ago. So far so good—but alas! No one had any idea where the couple had gone, they had not spoken of their plans, merely wished the newcomers good-day, and taken themselves off.

Raphael did the same, weary of limb and sick of heart. It seemed fated that he should keep just within a day's journey of Sally, arriving at her last halting-place always to find her gone. Hitherto he had been lucky enough to hear of her next pitch, but to-night she had disappeared entirely. Per-

haps, however, some one might be able to tell him of her at the Travellers' Rest, and this faint hope kept his body straight till he reached the door.

The Travellers' Rest was an attractive-looking house, rich in all the paraphernalia which romance assigns to a country cottage. A white gate opened upon a garden sweet with flowers, the first chrysanthemums and the last roses, with the heads of the torch-lilies glowing through the dusk. The house itself was grown over with roses and passion-vine, and its little windows gleamed white from under the thatch in the twilight of the stars.

Raphael knocked at the door, to which was fastened a rather dirty card: "Rooms to let, from 9*d*. a night." No one took any notice, though he could hear people moving and talking inside, so at last he lifted the latch and walked in. The kitchen was insufferably hot, and the air thick with a smell of cooking, not of one meal, but of a dozen, and the range was crowded with little pots and kettles, and pans frying sausages. The cooks were gathered round the fire, stirring, scuffling, swearing and spilling fat. At a table near the window one or two men were already eating, while entirely exposed to the rest of the room, a fine young fellow, stripped to the waist, was washing himself over the sink.

Raphael looked round agonizedly for Mr. and Mrs. Cortelyon. He found the latter nursing the sleepy Neddy on her knee, while her husband fought for the welfare of his bloater on the range. Moore insisted on relieving her of his boy, and took the warm drowsy bundle from her half in tenderness. He had not held Neddy in his arms since he was a baby, and the realisation of this fact combined with the new experience to touch him. Poor little Neddy! he had had a hard, hot day.

Mrs. Cortelyon introduced Raphael to Mr. Bright, the proprietor of the Rest. He was a taciturn fellow, expanding only in a rough caress to one or other of the girls who trailed about the room or slept with their heads on the table. The place was crowded, every corner seemed full of faces,

and every jargon came to Raphael's ears—shrill Cockney, the burr of the North, and the nasal drawl of Kent and Sussex.

There were one or two men who looked like respectable labourers, no doubt tramping for work; there was an American sailor, lank and humorous; a gentleman who sold laces; a typical criminal loafer, blue-chinned and bullet-headed; and three or four children whom it was difficult to apportion owing to their ubiquitous sprawling. On the settle by the fire sat a buxom, good-looking girl, nursing against her shoulder a meagre youth, evidently in the last stages of consumption. Every now and then his coughing shook them both, and she would wipe his mouth with a dirty handkerchief.

But the figure which most closely riveted Moore's attention was seated at the table, staring out of the window into the twilight, not so much at as beyond the stars. He was an immense man, with a peculiar greyness of face that matched well with the greyness of his hair. His rags were appalling —Raphael, showing only an occasional inch of skin, felt well-dressed in comparison—and over his shoulder and head was a filthy old sheep-skin, which Moore could smell even from where he sat.

"That's Elijah the Tishbite," said Mrs. Cortelyon, "dotty on the muffin, and goes about preaching. Shouldn't wonder if he gave us a sermon to-night."

He did not look much like preaching, however; his head was bending towards his folded hands, which were clenched piteously.

"He's worn out," said Raphael.

"'Tain't so much as he's tired," said Mrs. Cortelyon, with the air of a connoisseur, "as he's hungry. I knows that doddering sort o' look. Launcelot, how's the Bank of England?"

"Two and sixpence halfpenny."

"Well, if you and me can't get to Petersfield on two and six, I'll be ashamed of yer. Let Elijah have the b—— halfpenny for a feed."

"Well, the saying is 'Who gives to the poor he lends to

the Lord'," said Mr. Cortelyon unctuously, and laid a half-penny in his wife's palm.

On the left side of the range was a large pot, presided over by Mr. Bright, and intended for the benefit of those who did not cook their own supper. A "hap'orth" filled so large a bowl that Raphael decided there could be no better way of spending the penny allotted to his and Neddy's evening meal.

"Here, Elijah," said Mrs. Cortelyon, "the b—— ravens have brought you your supper again"; and she put down before the poor prophet her steaming bowl of soup, at the same time as Raphael and Neddy set theirs on the table.

The table was pretty full now, covered with sausages, kippers and bloaters, either lying on newspapers or trailing greasily on the wood. Elijah the Tishbite murmured a low "Selah!" to Mrs. Cortelyon, and fell to with a desperation that confirmed her diagnosis. He ate clumsily, spilling quantities on his tangled beard, hunting bits of bread round the bowl, and occasionally over the edge on to the table. His efforts seemed to amuse the other feeders, and the blue-chinned tramp began to realize the wit of plunging his fork into Elijah's bowl and fishing out the tit-bits he pursued. Raphael watched him in shy wretchedness—no one seemed to realize the cruelty of the joke, though the poor prophet's face grew piteous as one by one the precious morsels vanished. At last Moore could contain himself no longer.

"I'd be ashamed of myself if I was such a brute as you," he said thickly.

"Would yez? that's interestin'!" and the fellow whisked a bit of bread out of Elijah's very spoon.

"Yes, and I'll see that you behave yourself."

Raphael's blood was up. He had never felt quite like this before—hot, angry and yet yearning.

"'Ow?" The man stared at him insolently, and then with the back of his hand sent the Prophet's bowl spinning across the table.

The next moment Raphael's fist was in his eye.

"Father! Father!" screamed Neddy.

Indeed, his father was unrecognizable. He stood up, his fists clenched, his cheeks scarlet, his eyes flashing with rage and pity. The tramp at first seemed stunned by the blow, but the next moment he lurched forward and struck Moore heavily on the face. Raphael had not fought since his school-days, but he made a good fist and managed to make his adversary feel it, before he was given another blow in the face, which sent him to the ground. For a minute he lay along the wall, bleeding violently from the nose, while the tramp aimed a kick at his stomach, which fortunately only hit his thigh. Then Mr. Bright interfered.

"Come, come, we've had enough. Sheer off, Sam; I'm sure the gentleman owns himself licked."

The gentleman did. He rose miserably to his feet, his face covered with blood, and feeling twice its natural size, his thigh bruised and aching. He staggered back to the table beside the sobbing Neddy, and supported his head in his hands.

For a moment he scarcely knew where he was, what with pain of body and anguish of soul. Neddy was frightened of him, and shrank away. Elijah the Tishbite sat miserably staring at the chips of his bowl. Suddenly he turned to Raphael.

"Young man, the Lord has given me a message for you. Hark to His word: 'Thou art My son; this day have I begotten thee'."

CHAPTER XV

IN THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF ELIAS

Moore gave the prophet his own soup. He felt far too sick to finish it; Neddy's soup, too, remained untasted. The child was thoroughly cowed by all he had been through—the weary tramp, the strange faces, his father, too, so unaccountably altered from his gentleness. Neddy felt frightened of him, and dreaded the thought of sleeping with him, as he watched him there, trying to wipe the blood off his face with his sleeve, his cheeks and chin grown with dark stubble. Mr. Cortelyon came up and winked in his most fascinating manner, but Neddy remained uncomforted.

"You'd better go to bed, my poor old dear," said Mrs. Cortelyon to Raphael; "but come and hold your nose over the sink a bit first."

He stumbled after her across the room, and when he had let her bathe his face, he felt better and decided to take her advice and go to bed.

"You'll sleep much quieter if you can get off before the others come up," she assured him, and Neddy, still shuddering, was persuaded to leave the room, and trust himself with his strange father in the dark, plaster-smelling passages of the house.

The bedroom was full of watery moonlight. Raphael hunted for a candle, but could not find one. However, the moon was probably much brighter than any dip at the Travellers' Rest. He could see the room quite clearly. It contained six double beds, without curtain or screen of any kind, and no other furniture. A kind of horror filled him, and he was relieved to see Mrs. Cortelyon in the doorway.

"Does—does the Inspector allow this sort of thing?"

"Bless you, we don't have no Inspector. Bright knows a dodge worth two of that. If you puts up a board with 'rooms to let' you don't have no Inspector fussing round."

"I can't possibly stay here," said Raphael excitedly.

"Now don't you upset yourself, dear, or your nose'll start bleeding again. You get into the bed next the winder, and Launcelot and me 'ull take the next one, and then nobody need ever disturb you."

Raphael was so dog-weary that he lacked the physical power to object. He took off his coat, and crept under the bedclothes, where Neddy had already stolen, more reconciled to his fate. The sheets smelt strongly of fumigation, but they were dirty and stained, and Moore doubted if they had been washed for some time.

Mr. and Mrs. Cortelyon were soon in bed, and for about half an hour the latter fired off minute-gun advice to "go to sleep quick, for the others will soon be up." Thanks to her and other things, Raphael lay awake some time. His head ached, his swollen face was very painful, and the crowd of emotions he had passed through were still clamouring at his door. When the other lodgers came up the mere thought of sleep was impossible. For ten minutes or so the room was full of racket and swearing, sanguinary adjectives, and the beginnings of fights. However, no one had much time to waste in preparations for bed, and most had soon lain down. One woman knelt by her bedside, a cracked image of the Virgin on the coverlet. Raphael was surprised to see her pray, but the length of her kneeling was due to the fact that she had fallen asleep, and her husband soon got up and hauled her into bed.

The room was by no means quiet even now. There were a quantity of children, sleeping in their parents' beds for a penny each, and these woke up every now and then and wailed, and occasionally rolled out on the floor. The consumptive youth coughed incessantly, and again and again Raphael opened his eyes to see him and the girl sitting up in

the moonlight, their arms round each other's shoulders, both shaking in the anguish of one.

A feeling of misery and dereliction seized him, a hopeless and homeless helplessness. It seemed years since he had left Towncreep. The clean inn at Lindfield, with his supper in the parlour, breathing genteel simplicity, lay as in another life—an island his ship had left for ever. He actually felt tears at the back of his eyes, but as he turned his face to the wall, a strange, sweet reminiscent smell crept into his nostrils. The bed was next the window, and the outer wall was damp and crumbling. He sniffed again. Yes; it was the smell of Isle of Thorns.

He had always been particularly sensitive to the power of smell, and as he now breathed up that atmosphere of sweet decay, he saw in vision the heather-honeyed slope of Ashdown Forest, with one tall chimney, stark, broken, yet beautiful against the sky. Immediately a tender half-humorous peace crept into his heart. He lay very still, sniffing at the wall, and picturing the chimney on the heath, till the sky behind it glimmered with the yellow of dreams.

That sense of yellow, brooding and shimmering, was with him when he woke, and sat up to find the room full of sunlight. Every one had got up and gone down, except one woman, who still lay sound asleep, curled up like a child in a mass of tumbled bedding. Raphael made Neddy tread very quietly so as not to wake her, and they went downstairs. There was no washing accommodation except in the kitchen, and Moore for the first time had to choose between cleanliness and propriety. He chose the former; the room was crowded with breakfast-cookers and breakfast-eaters, but he had not washed since his fateful bath in the Ouse, and his face and neck were caked with blood that had trickled in the night and dried. So he made as good a business of it as he could. Shaving was out of the question, though his cheeks were dark with a two days' growth.

He was coming away from the sink when some one stole

up behind him, and he felt a hand fumbling with his. He looked round, and saw the consumptive boy's companion, who was trying to press twopence into his palm.

"Come on—döan't be proud," she said as he started away, "you and the kid 'ull never go far on that soup. It looks good enough, but there's tedious liddle in it but water."

He was terribly embarrassed, partly by his inability to make her take a refusal, partly by his longing to accept, for he was weak and hungry that morning.

"Jock and I can spare it beautifully," she assured him. "We're going on wud Mr. and Mrs. Cortelyon to Petersfield. I'd hoped to keep out of the Union a bit longer, for we'll never see the roads again together, but the lad he wur täaken so larmentable last night, and the days are getting that short and cold, as I can see it's no use holding out any more. Ah, there he is again."

She rushed towards the boy, who had been seized with another coughing fit, leaving her pennies in Raphael's hand. He tried to give them back to her when she came to wash her handkerchief at the sink, but she refused them so indignantly that he was persuaded to buy two red herrings, which, with Mrs. Cortelyon's help, he cooked for himself and Neddy.

"And you're sure you won't come with us to Petersfield?" said the lady, as she sportively wiped her greasy hands on her husband's hair. "Well, fools 'ull always be fools, I suppose, specially when there's a girl about. Where's your next doss?"

Raphael shook his head. He had made several inquiries after Sally among his companions that morning, but none had been answered.

"'Cos I was thinking that if you're going straight for Stanger's at Wittering, Elijah the Tishbite's bound for them parts, and 'ud show you the way as far as Chichester."

Raphael had already come to the conclusion that his best, or rather, his only plan would be to find Stanger's Show as quickly as possible. He had heard Sally was bound for Wit-

tering, and it was quite likely that he would hear of her, or even fall in with her, on the way; if not, that at the Show itself he would not be recognized, and would get news of Andy Baird.

Accordingly when the time came for setting out, he, Neddy, and Elijah took the southward road. Mr. and Mrs. Cortelyon started west, with the large party they had canvassed for Petersfield Workhouse. The separation was cordial in the extreme, and for the first mile or two Raphael had the new sensation of missing a lady whose conversation consisted largely of blanks, and whose baths were of catastrophic infrequency.

He found walking comparatively easy that morning, in spite of his blistered feet. The day, the first of October, was cool and grey, and the wind was driving up from the south-west. They passed through Adversane and Duncton, and came among the Downs at Shovelstrode. Elijah was not a sociable companion, and Raphael missed the chat and friendliness of the day before. The Prophet slouched off, his hands behind his back, his grey face peculiarly fixed.

Mrs. Cortelyon had given them a stock of bread and margarine, reduced by age to something like slabs of concrete smeared with grease. They ate these as they walked into the Down country. Raphael knew little of the Downs; he loved and explored the Forest and the weald, but his wanderings had seldom brought him into Sussex's other hemisphere of hill and marsh. Like the sea, the Downs borrow their tints from the sky, and that day, under a grey sky, the lone grey hills stretched towards the south. The sheep still cropped them, though soon they would be driven into the valley folds, and little white dots could be seen moving on the wilderness that heaved up either side of the road.

The strange country depressed Raphael, bringing him new chills of gloom. About the weald, no matter how dun the day, there always lingered a kind of wistful tenderness. But there was nothing on the Downs that was not cold and forlorn; the hills seemed to hold no heat of their own, which

might glow from them mildly when the winds were bleak. The little dark trees, blown all askew, the dew-ponds, glittering like ghostly eyes, the white gape of a chalk quarry on the slope, all gave him a feeling of unkindliness, which his Forest experience had not taught him to look for in Sussex.

Towards noon, the air grew a little warmer, and there was a pulse of sunlight on the hills, showing the huge cloud-shadows on their march. They passed the farmsteads of Boy Court and Thundersfield, where the shepherds were preparing to gather in their flocks. The summer was over—the great South-wester was blowing up the first autumn storm, after which the sun would shine and the dust rise as before, but in another world, of bare trees, and flowerless lanes, and woods where no bird called his mate.

When they came to Bignor, Elijah the Tishbite stopped suddenly. It was about five o'clock, and the wind rushed sighing up the street. He had not spoken for some hours, and Raphael was surprised to see his legs slacken; he had been so like a speechless automaton, trundling mechanically over the chalk-white roads.

"I have a message to deliver in this city." His eyes glittered with purpose, and ignoring his companions he strode to the churchyard steps.

"What's he going to do?" asked Neddy.

"I don't know. I'm afraid he's going to preach."

He wondered if he ought to stop the Prophet, whose strange appearance had already attracted a little group.

"Oh, let's sit down till he's finished," said Neddy. "I'm so tired."

He collapsed on the steps at Elijah's feet, and Raphael, realizing that interference would be useless, sat down beside him.

Once more he was struck by that odd sense of familiarity in the midst of strangeness. It seemed a perfectly natural and suitable thing that he should find himself sitting on the churchyard steps of an unknown village, cold and ragged, listening to the sermon of a crazy tramp.

Elijah stood erect, his grey hair floating in the wind, his grey face ghostly in the dusk. Men and women lounged in cottage doors to stare at him, others came and stood on the green, while children paused on their way home from the board-school, their satchels slung on their shoulders.

He was praying—at least, Raphael guessed that the wild jumble of words that poured from his lips was a prayer. Beginnings of texts became tangled with endings of others, frenzied implorings for faith and love became mixed with odd bits of personal supplication—for "little Dorothy," for "Mary" and "Winnie," "the lads" and "Mrs. Match." A week ago he would have been horrified at the bare idea of such ravings, now he found himself listening quietly, his blood hot with a great compassion. He knew that the villagers associated him with this poor lunatic, but he felt no shame, made no effort to remove himself from his side or to appear disgusted at what he said. The remembrance that he had fought for this man, and for his sake had been kicked and humiliated, seemed to bind him to him with bonds he could not have imagined before. He listened to him almost reverently, and kept a sharp watch on the crowd in case ribaldry should pass into opposition.

Elijah's prayer was over, and he had begun to preach. Soon Raphael became impressed by a kind of majesty in his phrases—the thoughts were often a mere jumble, crude and foolish, but the words more than once smacked of the sublime. A red streak showed itself in the clouds before him, unearthly in the waste of grey. He stretched out his arms towards it. "Oh, the sky, the sky, the red beautiful sky, which rests on the woods where the winds speak of God. . . . Oh, my children in the sky, my lost children, beyond the red-hot bar. . . ."

His arms quivered and his head fell back, while his lips moved agonizedly. For a moment there was silence, punctuated by great puffs of wind, then a cry burst from Elijah.

"I've lost it; I've lost it again."

He stooped towards Raphael. "Oh, lad! I've lost it—I've lost it."

"Lost what?"

"The message. I've lost it again. Just when my mouth was open to deliver it, the Lord took it from me."

Raphael scarcely knew what to do. Elijah was gripping his hand, and the crowd was giggling.

"Perhaps you'll remember it in a minute."

"Oh no. The Lord won't let me remember it. He always takes it from me. Oh dear! Oh dear!"

To Moore's utter horror he burst out crying, the tears making furrows on his grimy cheeks, and trickling from his beard. He sat down on the steps, sobbing childishly, to the terror of poor Neddy, who had never seen a grown-up person cry.

Hardly knowing what he was doing, Raphael rose to his feet, and tried to lead him away. The grey head stooped against his shoulder, and the childish tears soaked through his sleeve. They passed through the crowd, and when the village was left behind, Raphael sat down by the roadside, and set to work to comfort Elijah as he would comfort a baby. One or two boys had followed them, and Moore found himself throwing stones at them.

At last both the Tishbite's grief and Neddy's panic had been soothed, or at any rate silenced, and the three set forward through the dusk, now bordering on night. There was a moon behind the clouds, giving a peculiarly watery aspect to the night, which smelt of rain. The wind puffed over the hills, laden with damp, and Raphael shivered.

It must be nearly seven o'clock, and when they came to a cross-roads close to Halnaker, Moore stopped to consider the question of a doss. Thanks to the kindness of the girl at the Travellers' Rest he had still a penny in his pocket, but that would not go far in the way of lodging. So he decided to invest it in stale bread. Common sense told him that stale bread would be cheaper than new; all the same he was surprised at the quantity he carried away from the baker's; he

was to leave the roads with a profound respect for the smaller coins of the realm, the capabilities of which he had not till then even remotely imagined.

The next thing to do was to find a barn, and wandering a little farther down the Chichester road, he saw an oast-house against a sky that was no longer blocked out by hills. Fortune favoured him, for though the door at the top of the ladder was locked, so that he could not reach the warmth and dryness of the oast-barn, a door leading from the adjoining cartshed into the oast itself was open, and he and his party crept in.

A quaint trio, they sat in the darkness, freaked by the tiny ray of light that came in under the cowl. Raphael divided the bread into equal parts, putting aside a little for the next day. They were all very quiet, for Neddy was once again subdued by cold and fright, and Elijah refused to speak, except to himself. Now and then he mumbled something about a meeting at Chichester and having to be up early.

The wind was growing fiercer, and every now and then the oast would bellow with the storm. Raphael had some difficulty in persuading the Prophet to lie down and sleep. He sat rocking himself monotonously in the darkness: "The Lord was speaking to him; he must prepare his sermon for the next day, for the Archbishop would be there and all the other Bishops. But he was sure to forget the message, that was his punishment"—and here to Moore's horror, he began to cry again—"the punishment which the Lord had sent him for cursing the poor innocent children, and causing them to be eaten by bears."

"But that was Elisha," said Raphael.

The Tishbite stared at him.

"Elisha . . ." he repeated slowly.

"Yes. If I had a Bible, I could show you."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Then I didn't do it; I really didn't do it."

"Of course not."

"And I've been suffering all these years. . . ."

"It's a mistake," said Raphael, too eager to be surprised that he was treating the conversation as if it were rational. "You haven't remembered things rightly."

The wan ray was on Elijah's face, and for the first time Moore saw him smile.

"I can't be blamed for what Elisha did. I remember that he was often very troublesome; it was just like him to curse those dear little children, who were only speaking the truth when they said he was bald. They can't blame me for what Elisha did, can they, young man?"

"Oh, no—certainly not," said Raphael.

"You comfort me, young man; you comfort me strangely. I can bear much now that I know I didn't kill those poor little children. Perhaps the Lord will one day vouchsafe me to deliver His message. My doom is not eternal. Anyhow, I can bear it now that I know I did not slay those poor little ones."

He went over to Neddy and lay down beside him. Raphael was at first a little alarmed at this, doubting what conseqeunces would be discoverable the next morning and require slaughter. However, he reflected that they must all lie together or they would perish with cold, so he went and lay down on the other side of the child.

Two nearly sleepless nights had worn him out, but he did not sleep at once. The rain was lashing the tiles of the oast, and the bellow and rush of the storm was like some herd stampeding on the hills. Neddy and Elijah were both asleep, and as Raphael looked across his son at the latter, he found himself laughing. He was not surprised at his laughter, there seemed something appropriate in it, just as there had been in that even more unaccountable laugh at Isle of Thorns. The story of Elijah and the bears, the life-long haunting of a childish mistake, struck him as pathetically ludicrous, and the fact that it was also ludicrously pathetic only made him laugh the more.

He was glad that he had been able to lift the load of an-

guish from the poor Prophet's mind. Possibly the relief was only temporary, but at all events he would have a little respite; he might even forget the aching of that Message, so clamorous to be delivered, so hopelessly in prison. Then suddenly a thought struck Raphael. The Message had already been delivered—to him. To a miserable bleeding tramp, just risen from a beating on the floor, Elijah had spoken the Lord's Word: "Thou art My son; this day have I begotten thee."

He was so impressed by his discovery that he half thought of waking the Prophet. He sat up, but the next minute decided to let the weary one sleep on, and lay down again. A few minutes later he was asleep himself, and did not wake till the oast was white with a hurricane dawn.

Neddy was still drowsing softly, and the Tishbite lay with outstretched arms, one of them across the child's breast.

Raphael had grown quite used to commanding his party, and woke up Neddy with a shake of the shoulder. The boy struggled under the arm that held him down.

"Father, what is it? He's holding me."

"Nonsense, you silly child. Get up."

Neddy started up, and flung his arms round Moore. For a moment they both gazed horror-stricken at the Prophet. He was dead.

CHAPTER XVI

RAPHAEL SINGS OUT OF TUNE

The storm was still rumbling when Raphael and Neddy came out of the oast. The rain fell heavily, and the surface of the road was covered with hissing pools. The Downs in the North were wiped out in a scud of storm and to the South were fields—the flat fields of the shore.

Raphael wondered what he ought to do, and finally decided to go to the police-station at Halnaker. An hour later, the body of Elijah the Tishbite had been carried out of the oast, and Moore had given the inn at Wittering as his address, in case he should be wanted at the inquest. He and Neddy set out again on their journey, and as they plodded against the rain, Raphael made his son repeat after him a prayer for the peace of the Prophet's soul: "Where the light of Thy countenance visiteth them and shineth perpetually."

The rain still fell, more heavily as the wind abated, and the roads were thick with mud, through which he and Neddy found it hard to plod. The child had been tired to start with, and a coverless night in a draughty oast, a scanty breakfast, and a severe fright, do not put much strength into legs already weary. Raphael, feeling strangely fatherly, held his hand and pulled him along as best he could; but they neither of them went very fast.

The wind soon dropped entirely, and the rain splashed down straight into the mud. The Downs were now far behind in the northern wrack, and all round the country stretched drenched and flat. Raphael walked on, helped by an occasional sign-post. He had no idea where he was; he

passed strange whispering woods mourning over the leaves they had lost in the night, houses featureless in mist and rain, farm-yards made pungent by the damp, hay-ricks with the water dripping from their thatch. He wondered that he did not come to Chichester; for some time he had not seen a sign-post, and when at last he came to one, it was a single-armed affair, marked "Shopwyke."

However, he felt that if he went on tramping south he could not go far wrong. At midday he and the child sat down on a stone-heap and ate the remains of their bread.

Neddy was very quiet and subdued and, when pressed, owned to a sore throat. Raphael began to feel anxious; he had felt anxious about Neddy before, in an aloof kind of way, when he ailed with some cold or childish illness, but there was something more intimate in his fears that morning. He made the boy open his mouth, and tried to look into his throat in the pale sodden light, but Neddy only swallowed a large quantity of rain, and his father was none the wiser.

The best thing was certainly a brisk walk, but it is hard to be brisk when one's legs ache from ankle to thigh, and one's soaked boots rub blistered feet. The country was as before, flat and dripping, each mile was a repetition of the last—a succession of wet fields and woods, a shapeless house or two, and a background of mist. Raphael began to have doubts; surely he ought to have come to Chichester some time ago. At last he met a man driving a herd of drenched ewes along the lane, and was told to his horror that Chichester lay some three miles behind him, towards the west. However, hearing that he was bound for Wittering, the fellow advised him not to go back, but to strike south-west across the country, "and then you ought to come to it to-night, surelye."

With a sigh of depression and weariness, Raphael gave a pull to Neddy, who, during the discussion, had nearly fallen asleep, and splashed on through the mud and puddles. Soon a swift early dusk began to fall, and he could scarcely see his hand when he held it before his face. Mist and rain were all round him, and he had become so used to them, that

they were now as an invariable and almost unnoticed etcetera of existence.

"Oh, Father," said Neddy in a low tearful voice, "mayn't we rest a minute?"

Raphael himself could hardly go another step. He flopped down on the bank, and took Neddy on his knee, for fear that he should catch cold on the wet grass. He knew that it was folly to sit there, but for the life of him he could not help it. He was consumed with longing for a fire and a bed. Tramping was all very well in the golden days of sunshine and the silver nights of stars, but those were over now; winter was at hand, and a roadman's fancy lightly turned to thoughts of Petersfield Workhouse.

As he sat there he realized that he and the boy must absolutely have shelter that night. He did not regret the hardships of the last few days; apart from the facilities his mumper's life had given him for tracing Sally, he acknowledged other more subtle benefits. He had been sharply to school since those days of sunny gardens and simple quiet meals. If he had had only himself to consider he would still have clung to the open road and the rain; but he had his duty toward Neddy, he must not let him take cold—perhaps worse. A sudden contraction of pain made him draw the limp little figure closer into his arms. Poor Neddy! he had enjoyed his strange life at first, but he was tired of it now. Raphael would telegraph for money at the next post office they came to. He would ask only for half a sovereign—that would pay for supper and a night's lodging and the boy's train home the next day.

"Come, laddie," he said kindly, and set him on the road. Then they went on again, struggling through the dark, their nostrils thick with the smell of rain. At last a light twinkled ahead, then another, and another. They had come to a village, and Raphael looked eagerly round him for the post office. He soon found it. It was shut.

A groan burst from Moore. It was nearly nine, and it would be impossible for him to telegraph till the next morn-

ing. What could he do? He had no idea where he was. The village was a dreary little place; the houses were modern, small, and cheap, and there were bits of ill-laid pavement, and a flare of gas. He asked a man its name, and was told "Yapton." Was he far from Wittering? Why, he was near ten miles east of it.

With increasing despair, Moore realized that instead of keeping due south, he had drifted eastward, and was now on the flap of low ground that borders the coast behind Bognor and Felpham. He stood forlornly in the middle of the street, the rain beating down on him and Neddy. The child asked no questions, made no complaints, just stood holding his father's hand in damp spiritless submission. Raphael grew desperate, and decided to fling aside his shyness and ask for shelter. He would be able to pay for it the next morning, and, meantime, surely some kind heart would trust him for the sake of the boy.

He stared anxiously at the cottages, as if there was some chance of their revealing the character of their inhabitants. At last he ventured to knock at a door. Blushing and shaking with nervousness, he waited for it to be opened, and at last a woman came, allowing only a crack of light and part of her face to be seen.

"Go away," she said quickly, as she caught sight of her visitor; "we've nothing for you."

"I—I only wanted to ask——"

"No, no—you be off. We've had enough of your kind prowling round. Be off, I say, or I'll call my husband."

Raphael flushed and turned away without a word. Her voice had been more frightened than unkind, but he felt shamed and rebuffed.

"Won't she let us in?" asked poor Neddy.

"No."

"Then where are we going?"

"I don't know."

He was walking out of the village, leaving its squalid modernity and gas-flare; he felt that nothing would make

him ask at another door. After all, could he blame these people for refusing to admit an unknown tramp—in rags, unshaved, dirty, and wet—into their houses? He felt that they were perfectly right to repulse him. He would not ask again, he would rather, like the wanderer he had heard of, sing outside taverns for pence.

After all, that was what he would have to do. Neddy must have food and shelter that night, and his father must not shrink from any shift to procure them. The public houses would probably be pretty full at that time, and a little went such a long way on the roads that even a few coppers would be riches. Nothing was visible at present, only the dark wet lane; but after he had tramped, mechanical with weariness, another mile or two, he saw the welcome bar-lights streaming into the road.

He stopped and moistened his lips. He was terribly nervous. He liked singing, but he had never had any lessons, and he knew that his voice sounded crude and untrained. Still, there was no help for it. He wondered what he should sing, and at last made up his mind. He opened his mouth, but no sound would come. He grew furious with himself, and at last a very shaky bar shuddered out into the rain. Nervousness made his voice erratic, it wandered about perplexingly; he felt so self-conscious that he wondered all the occupants of the bar did not at once run out into the road. Neddy looked up in surprise at the first note or two, but he was so tired, and everything of late had happened so perplexingly, that he soon ceased to wonder at this new freak of his father's.

Raphael had not sung long before he realized that the difficulty was not how to keep away a curious and derisive audience, but how to entice an audience of any kind. The voices in the bar pursued uninterrupted their gruff course, no one came to listen or to stare, and the world seemed quite indifferent to the fact that Mr. Raphael Moore was making an absolute fool of himself outside the Cocks at Merstham.

His repertory was not very large. It consisted entirely of

Elizabethan and Carolean lyrics, set to music by Campion, Purcell and Prout. He sang Herrick's "Meadows" and Campion's "Laura," then thinking that perhaps something of a more popular kind was needed gave "Beware My Little Finger," and "Over a Whinny, Meg." Still there was no response. Perhaps those inside had not heard him. He went into the doorway, and, with the dregs of his courage, managed to wander through "The Maidens and the Bell." There were only three or four fellows in the bar, and they stared at him at intervals while he sang. When he finished he leaned against the doorpost, and looked at them, wondering what he could do.

"Give us 'Yip-i-yaddy,' and I'll see about a copper fur you," said a man who was drinking porter.

Raphael shook his head.

"Döant know it? You must be soft, I reckon. Well, try 'Lina Schmidt.'"

Raphael's eyes grew round with horror.

"Would you like 'Drink to me only with thine eyes'?" he ventured.

"Well, I shud if I wur standing the drink. Ha! Ha! You mean to say you döan't know 'Lina Schmidt'?"

"No."

"Then go and larn it."

This was evidently another joke, for the whole bar burst into roars of laughter, and Raphael, blushing to his ears, hurried out into the wet.

For some time he walked quickly, spurred by humiliation, but soon he realized that Neddy's feet were sliding in the mud, and he slackened the pace. He must have another try, and he wondered agonizedly whether he would be asked for "Lina Schmidt" at his next performance. He tried hard to remember the popular songs he had heard whistled by errand boys or played on barrel organs, but all he carried was here and there a dim recollection of the tune. His brain worked so actively that it seemed but a short time before he saw the

lights of another bar shining on the wet road, and heard another sign-board creaking in the wind.

He was outside the George at Mundham, and something seemed to be gripping at his throat and choking the notes he tried to force out. Neddy was nothing more than an automaton, walking when his father walked, stopping when his father stopped, always silent, always shivering.

It was nearly closing time, and there were not many people in the bar, judging by the voices. Raphael sang "Drink to me only with thine eyes," and waited in vain for some response from inside. No one took the slightest notice, so he started—

"I am true love that false was never."

Then he heard a man shout, "For heaven's sake some one go out and tell that fellow to sing in tune. I shall be sick if I have to listen to him much longer."

There was a general laugh, then a chair was pushed back, and the next minute a girl appeared in the doorway with a light behind her.

"Give him a penny to go and get lessons from Caruso," another voice called after her, but she did not speak.

In spite of the shadow on her face and the beard on his, each had recognized the other, and stood silent.

Then Sally gave a strange little sob, and went back into the bar.

CHAPTER XVII

MANHOOD'S SHORE

For some moments Raphael stood still. He hardly realized that he had actually seen Sally.

Dazed, drunk with fatigue, the sudden consummation of every hope scarcely had power to touch him. He stared at the door, with the light streaming through the glass of the upper half, and listened for her voice. Then he realized his helplessness, and turned away.

For days he had been anticipating their meeting, and had pictured what they both would say. The meeting had come at last, and they had both said the same—nothing. All the passionate pleadings, all the appeals to the best in her, which he had intended for that first encounter, must now be withheld for some future occasion. She was bound for Wittering; he would go and await her there. Meantime she was warm in the snugness of the bar, and he was homeless and cold in the night.

He was walking, or rather shuffling, southward. The wind was rising again, and blew quickly, as if laden with wet. He had no ideas, no hopes, left. He would find another barn, and lie wet and hungry, glad to have a wall between him and the wind, or he would plod all night, for fear of taking cold by sleeping in his soaked rags.

He felt dimly that he ought to be pondering the catastrophe just past, but his brain and heart were both unequal to the task. He let it slip into the chasm of the normal, which had become so rapacious of late, sucking down every new and strange experience, till at last it gorged itself with this, the crux and mystery of his life.

They walked about a mile, then Neddy's poor little legs bowed under him, and he fell into the mud. They walked another hundred yards, and Neddy fell again. Bending over him in the rain, dumb and stupid with weariness, Raphael realized the one warm place left in his heart. It seemed as if, while cold and fatigue swallowed up the critical and intellectual faculties of the man, they left in greater strength the natural instincts of the brute. A deep pitiful love for Neddy seemed to be the only emotion he had left, otherwise his mind was a blank, a sodden rain-washed thing. He picked the boy up, and laid him over his shoulder, very much as a shepherd carries a lamb. Then he staggered on under the burden.

It must be midnight. The few cottages he passed were dark; no one was about, though he seemed to see shapes crouching under the hedge. The moon was up, fighting behind the clouds, and the night was no longer as black as before. He could see the country he was going through; it seemed, if possible, flatter than ever. All round him was a huge marsh, ripped with dykes and dotted with willows. He heard the gurgling of the water on the sluices and weirs, and the crack and sigh of the osiers in the wind. He must have come to the great peninsula of Manhood, which runs out, flat and waste, into the southern sea—the desert remnant of a pleasant land, where the Main Woods once rang with the hunting of kings.

Here and there in the marsh were villages, Bosham, Appledram, Birdham, Sidlesham—and Wittering. He wanted to strike westward, but the road led obstinately south, and he dared not leave it for the pulpy grass. Then he began to hear a moaning and a roaring. At first he thought it was still the sluices and the weirs, but he soon realized it must be more than that. It grew in volume and hoarseness, till the air seemed to ring with it, and at last ahead of him he saw great tumbling streaks of white, and knew he had come to the sea.

Raphael had seen very little of the sea, and had none of the Londoner's passion for it; on the contrary, the blue horizon-streak sometimes visible from the heights of Ashdown had

never failed to introduce something unfathomable and unfriendly into the landscape he loved. To him the sea was a mystery, and a cruelty, and it seemed a fitting climax to the stress of the past day that he should find himself on the shore, by the lapping and the moaning of the waves, with that sense of utter loneliness which the Channel always brought.

He must be on the eastern coast of Manhood, for his road, now rough with shingle, still led south. The noise of the surf was deafening; it boomed and whispered and roared, it sighed, it sobbed, it raged, it sang. He felt that it was telling him of the forests it had engulfed, glades which had echoed to King Harry's horn, now lying in the eternal restlessness of green salt drench.

For what seemed hours and miles he tramped automatically over the shingle, his eyes fixed on the ground, Neddy on his back. The rain from the child's hair ran down his neck, but water in one form or other had become the basis and containant of his existence. He had forgotten what it felt like to be dry, what the wind was like without rain, what a path was like that did not run by the sea.

For some time he had been conscious neither of fatigue nor of cold; he could not have walked with less effort had he been rambling over the Forest to Isle of Thorns on some fluttering May-day, his limbs still warm with sleep. But suddenly something seemed to crack. Without a struggle or a cry he fell forward, and lay on the shingle, quite conscious, quite peaceful, quite unable to rise.

His defeat came as a surprise; he had thought himself capable of going on for ever. Now he knew that he was beaten, and would have to lie there in the roar and boom till his limbs either recovered their strength or froze into death. The sense of automatonism was wearing off, and as it passed he felt his brain quicken, his ideas begin to rush. His meeting with Sally, hitherto scarcely thought of, now became the centre of his musings. He found himself dwelling on its wonderfulness, its uselessness. Should he ever see her again?

And would she hear of it if the bodies of a man and a child were found on Manhood's beach?

He had taken Neddy into his arms, in a last feeble effort to protect him from the worst. As he held him there, a poor little muttering heap, he realized that there was one warm thing about him, after all—his newly-awakened sense of fatherhood. He wondered now how he could have felt indifferent to Neddy, held aloof from him, body and soul. Perhaps, after all, the object of his journey had been that he might win this new completeness, fill up that ugly gap in his existence; perhaps Sally had come into his life merely that through her he might learn to love another woman's child.

None the less, the longing for her was sharp and bitter, too fierce to be swaddled in the abstract. He wanted Sally herself, and it was hard to die without her, to leave her alone in the billows and floods. A year ago he would have thought of death as "going to Margaret," now he thought of it as "leaving Sally."

The wind still roared and the surf still bellowed. Nature was thundering through her Tenebrae. The world seemed to slip from Raphael, and he found himself most wonderfully alone. He must have seen with eyes other than the eyes of his body, for to him the sky was full of great stars, too large to be real, burning dimly and nebulously like lamps. He saw nothing but this dream sky; it was above him, around him, and beneath. A great wind sang over it, and it seemed part of himself in some terrible way. Was it death? Was it the great sky of the dead, to which men lift their eyes when their lids have fallen in this world? A strange, beautiful peace was stealing over him; Margaret would come to him soon, and his feet would forget the highways that had made them bleed. . . . But his work was only half finished; he could not die and leave Sally without her only friend. The great sky with its lamps seemed to fall back from him, and he felt stones under his head.

He opened his eyes and saw another sky, fleeced with clouds, and bright with tearful spreads of blue. It was morn-

ing, and the shingle lay all round him, and the smell of seaweed and salt was in the air.

He raised himself painfully on his elbow. The tide was out, and the rim of the surf was a full furlong off; the boom had died into a rumble, and the waves that heaved away to the horizon were all kinds of lovely colours, green and blue, pink and brown, while the shadows of the clouds moved slowly over the swell.

Raphael saw that he was lying close to a breakwater, and with great difficulty he stumbled to his feet, and looked over it. To his surprise he saw a row of little bungalows, stretching along the shore, their wet roofs shining in the dawn. Where was he? He stooped down and picked up Neddy, thankful for his return of comparative strength. The boy was muttering deliriously about "Lina Schmidt," showing that the tavern episode had sunk deeper into his mind than had appeared. Raphael carried him round the breakwater and walked towards Bungalow Town.

PART III

"I am true love that false was nevere,
Mi sistyr, mannis soul, I loved her thus,
Because we wolde in no wise discevere;
I left my Kyngdom glorious.
I purveyde for hir a paleis precious;
She fleyth, I followe, I sought hir so,
I suffride this peyne piteous
Quia amore langueo."

Fifteenth century poem.

PART III

CHAPTER XVIII

THE INN AT MUNDHAM

The darkness swallowed him up, and she shut the door.

"Well, Sal—which did you do?—bribe him or scare him?"

"He went," said Sally.

She sat down on her chair by the counter, and lifted her glass, not so much because she wanted to drink as because she wanted to hide her face. But when she was staring into the turgid brown beer that frothed against her lips, she realized that the face she wanted to hide was not her own.

Even then she was not quite sure what had happened. Her surroundings seemed to give the lie to remembrance—surely Andy would not be sitting there so stolidly with his pipe, picking up the conversation just where it had dropped when the singer outside became unbearable, if the singer had really been Raphael. The bar with its fuggy atmosphere, the curling tobacco-smoke, the smell of beer, the dark heavy forms of the men seen dimly through the reek— somehow she felt as if all these would have changed if her "poor splendid young man" had really been singing in the rain.

For a moment she was inclined to doubt the whole thing. Perhaps she had never left her chair and that pathetic voice had rung only in her brain, unbalanced by excitement, dread, and pleasure. But in her hand was the warm sixpence she had meant to give him. She saw that she must change the nature of her doubts. Perhaps it had not been Raphael after all, only some one like him—the resemblance of the child to Neddy might also have been accidental. The idea that her grave decorous Raphael should be singing in dirt and rags

outside taverns at night was an orgy of imagination for which only a disordered intellect could be responsible. And yet it was those very rags and dirt which gave the most emphatic evidence of reality—if she had recognized Moore in them and in spite of them, that must be a sign of the genuineness of her recognition. It would have been comparatively natural for her to have imagined him in some quiet well-dressed young man, but that she should have seen him in a grimy tramp, stripped of all sense of dignity and decency, surely that pointed to something more than mere likeness and imagination. The man she had seen was not like Moore, he was distinctly unlike him, and yet she had known him at once—there lay the whole point of the matter.

But how had he come?—Why had he come? The questions were simply unanswerable. That Raphael should take steps to trace her was natural enough, but what course could involve what she had just seen? A great fear seized Sally—she did not know of what—she felt her whole body tremble and grow damp. The wind lashed against the window in a sudden hoarse gust, then she heard it go sobbing up the road, to lose itself in the woods.

"Ugh!" said Andy, "this damnable weather makes me glad we're going back to the Show—doesn't it, Missus?" he added as Sally stared vacantly at her beer.

"I'm not your missus," she retorted, but without much enthusiasm. Andy had a habit of calling her "missus" when other people were present.

"Then what are you, I should like to know?" asked the Scotchman coolly, as he filled his pipe.

"I'm your friend," she replied, still inertly, but with an uneasy sense of rage as she realized that no one in the bar believed her.

For six days Andy had been the centre of her life, though now his seat was shaken. Since the morning when she had slid down the roof into his arms, they had careered together madly through the nights and days, through strange tangles of emotion, attraction, repulsion—Autumn and adventure.

Her retrospect rang with the thud of hoofs on frosty roads, the lurch and rumble of a cart, with wild words and kisses, screams and escapes—it smelled of bonfires, of half-frozen dew, of pungent leaf-strewn woods—it tasted of stream water, earthy and leafy, of rainy blackberries. But now for the first time she found herself looking on it as a past—it no longer galloped round her, she had been snatched from it into a present of cloud and storm, of pelting rain and howling wind, with a wild voice sobbing through it, singing of eternal love in the rain.

It was nearly closing-time, and the bar was beginning to empty itself. One by one figures rose in the reek, pulled up their collars, and plunged out. When only two were left besides her and Andy, Sally got up, to creep stealthily from the room. Apparently he did not notice her, but only apparently —for as she passed him, his hand suddenly took hers and held it for a moment. His attitude did not change, and his conversation was not interrupted, but somehow there was a power, a vehemence in that almost languid clasp which struck terror into her like fire and ice.

Outside, the staircase was unlighted. Sally fumbled her way up to it, to a door at the head. The pale glow of a fighting moon tore through the storm to greet her as she entered the room. Her hands trembled as they turned the key in the lock. She shook the door once or twice to see that it held, then she struck a light.

The room was a typical tavern bedroom—large, low and squalid. The uneven walls and heavily-beamed ceiling contrasted with a quantity of cheap and modern furniture—an iron bedstead, painted wardrobe and washing-stand, and a hideous Victorian sofa, bulging with broken springs. It faced south-west, and bore the full brunt of the storm on its windows. Sally leaned her elbows on the sill and looked out, though she could see nothing but the drops that glittered on the pane in the candle-light. The rain beat on the glass like small shot, while the wind howled as if it was going to tear the roof off.

Then suddenly she realized that Raphael was probably out in the storm. For some time the vision had been detached—the tramp-singer had neither past nor future, he only existed in one sharp mysterious moment of rain and song. Now she began to conjecture where he had gone, and a sudden conviction seized her that he was near. In vain she repeated to herself—"Mr. Raphael Moore has never in his whole life been known to do a startling or indecorous thing. He is at this moment sitting in the parlour at Towncreep Farm, smoking a Virginia cigarette." She knew that she was only cheating herself—conjecture laboured more earnestly than ever, retrospect became more and more comprehensive. An hour ago her life had been six days of choke and thrill and horse-hoofs on a country road; now those days were assuming the horrible shape of a parenthesis, a mere whirling interlude to the realities of life. On Sunday, Saturday was a hundred years ago, on Friday it was yesterday. Certain violent moments in the heart of woods were forgotten, and in their stead was a single memory of a ruined cottage touched by sunset, and a man's shy lips against her face.

She flung the window open, and thrust out her head. The rain spattered her cheeks and neck, the wind dragged her hair from its pins and blew it out in streamers round her face. Perhaps Raphael was sheltering among the outhouses. Nothing was impossible now—that was the awful part of it all. The most wildly impossible thing she could ever have imagined had happened, and there were no longer any rules to guide conjecture.

"Raphael!" . . .

Her own cry surprised her. She stretched out her arms and called again—"Raphael! . . ." For an instant she thought she heard an answer, faint and far among the barns, but the next moment knew it was only the wind. She was glad he was not there. The impulse which had made her cry his name had passed as suddenly as it had come—it had been a mistake, another freak of the impossible. She shut the window with a crash, and swung back into the room.

Taking a towel, she wiped the rain off her face, wishing she had not shouted so loud—it was silly, and some one might have heard her. There were footsteps tramping about downstairs—evidently the landlord shutting up. She again tried the fastenings of the door, and realized that she was desperately frightened.

She was used to that sudden rush of fear, and she liked it. It was in the nature of a stimulant, life's alcohol, which she took in ever-increasing doses. She remembered long glades down which she had raced, over rustling leaves, the swish of Andy's footsteps after her. She remembered wild wakings in her tent, sudden oncomings of panic, ending in laughter. She went and listened at the keyhole, clutched at her heart, and stepped back into the room. She wondered why people set so little store on fear.

Then suddenly her mood changed; she looked round her at the hideous furniture seen in a gutter of candlelight, sniffed up the smell of damp must—and realized the foulness of it all.

"Ye Gods! Sally Odiarne," she cried; "what muck!"

She had not realized it before. It must be the room, that sofa with the broken springs. Out in the lanes she had never realized the uncleanness of her thrills. Fields, stars, and winds had all been part of her adventure, hallowing it. But now, here she stood in a dingy tavern bedroom, seeking protection in a locked door—just an ordinary foolish woman hiding from an ordinary beast of a man. The whole thing was hideous—revolting.

Her sensations were rather like those of a week ago, when after all her struggles and her mad grasp at salvation, she realized that it was still possible for her to meet Andy at Nettlefold Gun. It was another case of that which she had regarded as final, suddenly appearing as a makeshift, a mere interlude. Once more she knew she was still free to choose, her eternal lot was not yet settled, as she had supposed—she had not yet made the Great Refusal.

She had been too deeply engrossed in her thoughts to notice the voices which for the last ten minutes had been audible in the room beneath her. But suddenly she was startled by a noisy outburst of feminine grief. A woman was crying, loudly like a child—but before Sally had time to do more than shudder, the misery became muffled, and at the same time she heard a man's voice speaking tenderly. She listened a little longer, then, seized by an uneasy suspicion, went to the door, and slipped out on the landing.

Yes—she had been right; the man was Andy—and who was the woman? What woman could he be talking to at this hour? The question brought with it a sense of shame and wonder. Was she really jealous?—She, who did not love Andy. Yes, she certainly was; her heart was on fire with curiosity, hate, and longing. Self-revelation is a bad thing to seize one on the stairs. Sally nearly fell down in the grip of hers, and clutched at the banisters. She could hear Andy's voice distinctly—

"Poor wee girl—poor wee mouse."

He was a good comforter. There was a certain homeliness about his affections, in spite of their doubtful character, which always showed to advantage in times of trouble. She remembered his gentleness during the first hours of her illness, and there were moments during the great six days in which he had been just a warm fat thing to cling to.

But what woman could he be comforting now? Hitherto, strangely enough, she had never considered the possibility of a rival, but now a wave of terrified suspicion surged over her, freezing her blood. Who was this woman? She was evidently a common woman, judging by her voice. Perhaps she was some one from Stanger's. Sally had not been near the Show for five months, and there was no saying what might not have happened during her absence. She remembered how Andy had left her alone all that summer; and now he was returning to the Show after a much shorter escapade than she had expected; it seemed almost as if he had grown tired of their adventures. This struck her for the first time.

She was at the bottom of the stairs, and hesitated; then, revolting against anything which smacked of spying, she boldly flung open the door and walked in. The room was a billiard-room, and on the table sat Andy and a lady who sobbed convulsively against his shoulder. She wore a red and black striped dress, a yellow shawl, and closely crimped hair. Even before she lifted her face, Sally recognized her as Nellie Stanger.

For a moment it seemed as if both were seized with confusion, but the impression was merely transitory. Andy put on a nonchalant, matter-of-fact air, and pressed down Nellie's head again to his coat.

"Hullo, Sal?"

"I—I heard some one crying, and thought I'd better see who it was."

"It's Mrs. Stanger here—as you see," said Andy, pulling out one of Nellie's crimped locks to its full length, and staring at it abstractedly. "She's had a row with her man. Never mind the old gorpus, Nell; he'll sleep it off."

"I wonder how she knew you were here."

"She didn't know, bless her! She came for a drink."

"After closing-time?" Sally was tempted to ask sarcastically, but she was too proud to quarrel with Baird in front of another woman.

"So cheer up, lassie," said Andy, patting Mrs. Stanger's back; "cheer up and run home to the bairns."

"Oh, Scotchie! . . ." she roared miserably, lifting her head.

"I'll be along at Wittering to-morrow, and I'll manage to smooth him down if he isn't all right by then."

"Scotchie—you promised."

"Yes—yes—of course I promise. There, lassie, don't be hysterical. Leave hold."

"I can't! . . . I can't!"

"It'll be quite all right, I tell you," said Andy, trying to make her stand on her feet, then, seeing that she refused to do so, picking her up bodily; "the old gomeril isn't bad at heart."

"Oh, the damned ——" cried Nellie, using a term of abuse generally applied to a woman.

Andy got her out into the passage. She kicked violently, and Sally heard the heels of her boots dragging along the wax-cloth. Then she heard him draw back the bolts; a gust of wind whirled into the billiard-room, then the door shut with a crash and loud hysterical crying mingled with the storm.

Andy came back, mopping his brow.

"She's on the doorstep," said Sally; "she'll catch her death of cold."

"Oh, she'll soon run home. Wittering isn't far."

"Still, I'm surprised she should come all this way for a drink."

"It's the nearest pub where she can get Dunk & Co.'s."

"She must be particular about her drinks."

"Always was."

His coolness exasperated Sally.

"You liar! You know you're cramming me with lies; you know there's something up between you and that woman."

"Lord, Sal!—you aren't jealous?"

"It isn't a case of jealousy at all; it's a case of proper pride. You make me come away with you—break every link with my friends and a respectable life—and then go and carry on with another woman."

"If that's what you call carrying on——"

"Oh, I know you tried to change your tune when I came in. But it's no use. Please don't invent any more yarns. You only make matters worse when you show me you think I'm fool enough to believe such rot."

In spite of herself, her throat contracted, and she sobbed dryly.

"Sal!" cried Andy, "you care—you love me!"

"I don't love you—but I—I do care."

He understood. That was one of his attractions. Points of feminine psychology which would have baffled, not to say shocked, Moore, were to Andy both lucid and natural. She

felt she was relenting, and snatched herself back into wrath.

"Of course I care! how can I help it? I understand everything now. I understand why you left me in the lurch last summer—why you're hurrying back to the Show . . . you love Nellie Stanger—I'm only your pick-up—you've got tired of me—you're——"

She covered her face with her hands, and cried bitterly.

They were sitting side by side on the billiard table, and the next moment his arm was round her and her head down to his shoulder. She tried to struggle, but he held her fast.

"You cuddy—ass!—did Nell look as if I'd chucked you over for her sake? Do you think that if we'd been sweethearts she'd have come round here and kicked up the devil's own row?—why did she do it?—because she saw how I loved you and meant to stick to you."

"Then you did love her once!"

"I'll be straight with you, Sal—I did. I got thick with her soon after I joined the Show—you know she always was the very devil. I'm only one of a lot—damn her!—and, just my rosy luck, the only one her husband's found out."

"Then it was true—what you said about him?"

"Of course it was—you needn't look so surprised. But I'll soon smooth him down. I'll make it perfectly clear that everything's over now. If he doubts me, he can send her home, and have the other Mrs. Stanger on for a bit."

"'Everything' didn't look much like being 'over,' when I saw you and her in here."

"I was only comforting her. You know how soft I am. I can't bear to see you girls crying your bonnie eyes out, especially when you make such an infernal noise that I expect the whole country to hear."

"I wonder you like to go back to the Show to-morrow if Old Stanger's found you out. There must be some fairly strong attraction——"

"Only my business, you suspicious little beast. I never can leave that more than five or six days. As for Old Stanger, I'll soon soft-sawder him. Sal, I swear it's all up between

me and Nellie, so give me a kiss, and dry your eyes before they're quite bunged up."

"I'm not going to take her leavings."

"Hoots!—there isn't a man about Stanger's who hasn't had his turn with her, one time or another. She'll have some one else on next week. Besides, I never was very thick with her. The only woman I've ever cared about is you—though you don't deserve it."

"Why?"

"Because you don't play the game—oh, my darling little missus!" He stooped his head suddenly, and kissed her eyes.

Sally gave a desperate kick.

"What you call playing the game is what I call being deadly conventional."

"That's just your idiotic point of view. You don't dare play the game, and you bolster up your cowardice—not with the voice of conscience and the Ten Commandments and other things made for the purpose, but with the very unconventionality which ought to make you ready to dare anything."

Sally shuddered a little. She wished she had not felt that sudden revulsion of feeling in her bedroom half an hour ago. Somehow it had changed her attitude. She could no longer satisfy her soul with a glowing retrospect; her glorious thrills had only to be transplanted into drab surroundings for her to be nauseated by them.

"Sally, my dear," continued Baird, "you're the enterprise of Roaring Camp grafted on to the morals of West Kensington. For your benefit I will paraphrase a highly respectable poet—

> "'A little devilry's a dangerous thing
> Drink deep or taste not the infernal spring.'

It's useless to pretend you're holding back for unconventional and artistic reasons. If we'd carried the whole thing through platonically up till now, I own it would be a shame to spoil it; but, candidly, do you see anything the least

platonic in the last six days? Why, you'd never have run away with me at all if there hadn't been a chance of our becoming something more than friends."

"How dare you!"

"Well, it's true—and it's a compliment."

"You know I don't love you."

"You've never given yourself the chance. You've always been plunged in psychological orgies. You haven't realized that there's another and better adventure than the psychological, and that's always shared by two."

"Do you really love me, Andy? You don't—there's that woman."

"That woman be damned!"

He spoke with such spontaneous fierceness that she was suddenly convinced of his integrity. At the same time, a new doubt shot into her mind—if she failed Andy now, he might be driven by sheer disillusion and disgust to console himself with Nellie Stanger. How such desperate jealousy could exist where there was no love was a problem too deep for her to solve. All she knew was that the idea of losing Andy was unbearable—unthinkable.

"Darling Sally, you're such a fool. You've got all your ideas so hopelessly mixed that you don't know whether you love me or not. I say that you do, and you'll find it out precious quick—when you try the Great Adventure for Two."

She had not struggled for so long that his clasp of her had relaxed, and suddenly she was free. She sat up straight beside him, with dry skin and flashing eyes. She had not broken away out of fear, but because she wanted to think, to grapple with a new discovery. She realized that the future he set before her was her only chance of forgetting the past. The past had begun to stink, and the only cure was not atonement but fulfilment. If she fulfilled the past she would forget it, it would become part of a fiercer adventure, be merged into it and burnt out by it. She saw ahead of her a new country of shock and alarm, experience and ecstacy.

"Psychological orgies" were done with; both soul and body would have share in the new enterprise—uncharted territories in each would appear for her eager life to explore. And in all it would be a new dignity—the dignity of loved womanhood, companioned, protected, and hungered for. Oh, God in heaven!—the Great Adventure for Two. . . .

"My darling girl . . ." He guessed that her poor little heart was once more going through a crisis, and with great tact he refrained from touching her, merely leaning towards her and trying to look into her eyes. Then, as he saw the tears rise in them, he took her hand, and by it drew her unresisting to him.

She let him take her into his arms. There was a strange inertia in her limbs, part somehow of the fierce activity in her soul. And yet unconsciously she was holding him off, her elbow thrust against his breast.

Visions of mad adventure passed before her eyes—how was it she had not pictured them before?—the showman and his missus tramping light-heartedly through the lanes, singing in the moon-dusk, sharing in the communion of a common thrill the beauty of field and tree and star. . . . The vision suddenly changed, leaving her face to face with a dark and rain-drenched night, a bellowing storm in which stood a tramp, holding by the hand a ragged child. . . .

"I am true love that false was never. . . ."

Baird saw her expression change. For a moment she seemed to sit in a listening attitude; then suddenly, by an unexpected twist, she flung herself free.

"Sally! . . . my own girl!" He seized hold of her dress.

"No—no; I've changed my mind."

She broke from him, and dashed out of the room.

CHAPTER XIX

THE WAY OF THE SEA

For the first time in her life Sally had a sleepless night. She lay tossing from one side of the bed to the other, watching the window-square grow from grey to white. In vain she tried to compose her limbs—the desperate activity of her mind seemed to take possession of them and twist them into all kinds of crumpled attitudes. She had never known what it was to have such thoughts, such cravings, such regrets. Her mind was a bag of odds and ends—full of strange tags of feeling, tangles of motive, horrible mixtures of desire. To the end of her life her idea of hell would be such a state of chaos and conjecture. She pictured damnation as eternal uncertainty as to whether one was damned or not.

She had no idea of where she really stood. Sometimes she thought she had done the definite act of renunciation which bound her to a decent life, at others she felt sure that she had irrevocably pledged herself to Andy and the dogs. Five hours ago she had been agonized by the thought that she was still free to choose, now she was tormented by the thought that she had chosen—but did not know what.

Her discovery of Nellie Stanger in the billiard-room caused her agonies of conjecture in another direction. How far had matters gone between her and Baird? A good way, probably, for Old Stanger was showing signs of unrest, and he had never made the slightest objection to his wife's ordinary two-a-week flirtations—which had always been carried on with perfect simplicity under his nose. According to Andy, the thing had taken place three years ago—but that was nonsense! Nellie the fickle and perfidious could not

still be nursing the ashes of a three-years-dead passion, any more than her husband was likely to have only just discovered a transgression three years old. Probably during that fateful summer there had been a revival of an affair which must have gone farther than such matters usually went with Nellie.

Sally tumbled over on her side and moaned. She felt that Baird's frankness had been only an appearance; he had told her only half the truth. She believed that his passion was now dead, and calmer reflection told her that his return to the Show was a necessary piece of business if he did not want to be swindled by gipsy Carew. But she was full of alarm as to the consequences. Nellie would leave no stone unturned to win him back; he had evidently made a deeper impression than any one else on her merry-go-round affections, and she was not the woman to bear meekly with a man's unfaithfulness. Sally had had it in her power to make all her blandishments unavailing; if she and Baird had returned to Stanger's "something more than friends" it was not likely that a woman of Nellie's type could have taken him from her. But if they went back just as they had started, with the additional drawback that he was disappointed in her, disgusted with her—why, Nellie would have an easy time of it.

That brought her back again to the beginning, to her old unanswerable question. How was she returning to the Show?—secure in Andy's love against all the rivalries of crimp-haired sirens, or hopelessly at a disadvantage, despised and set aside, because she would not "play the game"? This time she realized that certainty was impossible till she had seen Baird. His attitude towards last night's episode was the only thing that could give her a clue as to her own.

She rose early, and went down to breakfast, white and tremulous, lines at the corners of her mouth and grey smudges under eyes. The storm had cleared, though a high wind still played over the roads, ruffling the rain-pools. The sky found mirrors in strange places—the roofs of the barns,

the flags of the yard, the tarpaulins of waggons stopping at the door.

Andy was in the little stuffy dining-room at the back, seldom used, and smelling of stale tobacco. He nodded to Sally as she came in.

"Good-morning. I hope you slept well."

"Yes, thank you."

"I'm glad the weather's cleared; it's rough luck on Old Stanger if he has a wet Saturday."

Sally sat down opposite him, a feeling which can only be described as sodden bitterness in her heart.

"Do you mind sardines?" continued Andy, his eyes half shut. "I thought we might as well finish our own grub. They've got nothing eatable here."

Sally remembered opening that box of sardines—in Mockbeggar Wood, near Ardinglyle. The scene came before her in a sudden tearful dazzle—the rides with their reds and yellows, whimpled in an evening sun, the distant call of a bird, the scent of wet crushed leaves, sodden earth and berries. It glowed with a redness of young adventure to which she had been blind in yesterday's recoil. There might be ugly moments in her retrospect, but memories that had power to hallow even a tin of sardines could not be altogether vile. The sudden descent of her grief into the commonplace was almost too much for her woman's heart, and she had difficulty in fighting back her tears.

Andy ate a huge meal, without much conversation. The fatuousness and propriety of his remarks could not, Sally told herself wrathfully, have been beaten by Raphael Moore at the Towncreep breakfast table. Indeed, she might be at Towncreep if it were not for the food, every item of which had a past. Andy's eating soon acquired a symbolic character. It was as if, deliberately and piecemeal, he were disposing of their life together, swallowing down its golden mysteries—as he ate the bread they had bought at Duddleswhorne, with the cheese bought at Piekreed Farm—stirred his tea, brewed from a packet they had opened one night

in the woods of the Tilts—when, for fear she should take cold, he had lain at her feet and warmed them against his breast. . . .

The she saw it all—there had been no evil in that dream of woods and streams and a man's homely gentleness. The evil had been in herself, in a certain false outlook which had tarnished her experience. But now she was desperately sincere—and of course her choice was made! She had chosen life with Andy, regardless of consequences, scruples or questions. She wondered how she could ever have doubted, asked "which?" Of course her choice was made—and of course she could never take it. In a moment of sick longing and abandonment she had made it, and in a moment of sentimental and insane reaction she had lost for ever all chance of taking it.

She stared at Andy across her plate of bread, and read her judgment in his half-shut eyes. It seemed as if he mocked her from under their lids—mocked the poor woman who had all the will in the world to sin but not the courage. Then straight into her heart shot a boiling hatred of Raphael Moore. It was he who had ruined her life with his indecent pranks. Through him she had missed her one and only chance; he had tricked her into sentimentality—a vice she hated above all others and from which so far she had kept singularly free. All these years that fleering British folly had failed to track her down, but now, at the climax of her life, Raphael had sprung it upon her out of the dark.

She remembered how, a week ago, she had looked upon him as an instrument of Providence specially constructed for her salvation; she had regarded his offer of marriage as the one purpose of the gods in creating him. She had been wrong, of course. His life-work had not been accomplished last Saturday, but last night, and he had not been sent to her by Providence, but by Mrs. Grundy.

The wind was puffing and fluttering outside the inn, swinging the sign-board, and shaking derisively the bushes it had stripped. Andy's cart was waiting, with his impatient cob.

Sally put her bundle in at the back, among the tea-things, and the bedding, and the tangle of cord and canvas which two nights ago had been a tent in a brown wood. Andy helped her climb up over the wheel, and the next minute they were off—spanking gaily along the uneven road, the cob's hoofs splashing rain-water over the wheels. Little clouds raced their shadows across the fields, farm-windows flashed, wet barn-roofs gleamed, flames of sudden colour burst out of the hedges. The whole thing was as ghastly to Sally as the dead face of some one we love.

For a little way the road led through cultivated land, but soon after Ramskitchen it began to wind on to the marsh. The breeze grew salt and savourous with seaweed, the dykes and streams moved with a strong current from the south, of which the cattle would not drink, the dust became choked with shingle over which even Andy's cob trod laboriously, and the trees were blown askew from the south-east. Sally did not know enough of Sussex to tell what this portended; all she knew was that the slackening of the pace meant a quickening of torment. She could no longer kill her thoughts with rhythm—the slow irregular movements of the cart, the monotony of the marsh landscape, all stimulated reflection. Bathos and bitterness—bathos and bitterness—was the message of Manhood to her, the woman who had all the will in the world to sin, but not the courage.

Now and then she gradually lifted her eyes to the man beside her, whom she did not love, who yet was all the world to her. He smoked in stolid silence, and she wondered what he was thinking. She had disgraced herself utterly with him, and could find no comfort in the thought that she had done right—for she doubted the gloriousness both of her renunciation and of the motives which had inspired it. For nearly a week she had encouraged a whole lot of silly faked emotions, unclean because they were insincere, and yet had shrunk in virtuous horror from a proposal which, considering her behaviour, was not only logical, but decent and generous. Sally saw herself a prude—not

a prude from conviction, which is a form of the disease one can respect, but a prude out of cowardice and sentimentality.

The road wound on. It was very desolate—they scarcely passed a farm, though once an old red tide-mill looked at them over a hillock. At last in the west appeared a clump of trees, through which could be seen here and there a bit of black wall or russet gable. It was Wittering, and Stanger's Show encamped in a field beyond it.

The cob swung out into a trot as the road grew smoother and they jolted off the marsh into the village. A few minutes later they were lurching over Stanger's Field. Almost faint with apprehension Sally wondered agonizedly where they would stop. They stopped outside the Joes' caravan.

"I'll put you down here, Sal, and go and fix up my traps. You will be staying with the niggers?"

"Yes."

He dismounted, and helped her out of the cart. For a moment, a fraction of a second, it seemed to her as if his hands lingered at her waist. Then suddenly he took them away.

"So long, old girl."

"Good-bye, Andy—we've had a ripping time."

She waited till he had driven away, then her trembling knees bowed under her, and she sank down upon the caravan steps, hiding her face.

Mrs. Joe was rather surprised to see her.

"I made sure as you was going to live along of Scotchie," she said with the frankness Sally had once thought such a delightful characteristic of Stanger's Show; "the whole place is that bunged up with brats as I really don't see where you're to sleep. But I reckon we'll manage to squeeze you in somewhere."

With this reassuring statement she flung her boarder's luggage into the van.

"I wonder young Baird likes to come back," she continued, "after all the row there's been. Old Stanger swears

he'll make catsmeat of him—not that he's likely to do it, still if I was Scotchie I'd bing wide for a day or two."

Sally was tempted to ask her if she knew how far matters had gone with Nellie, but was kept back by her pride. After all, the affair must be at an end, or Mrs. Joe would not discuss it with her in this way, neither would she be surprised at her return.

"How did Stanger find out?" she asked with would-be carelessness.

"Women dat play the debbil always gets found out," answered Joe the nigger, sticking his head out of the van where he had been sorting cocoanuts, and making a face at his wife.

"You're right there," said she; "when I was a young gal and walking out with Jack Huckleton of the Glynde Nurseries, we used to drop in o' Sundays to a holy place, and the dean he once said as everything you did got written down by chaps in heaven—maybe they've shown Old Stanger Nellie's book."

"A b—— good husban' he's bin to her," said Joe; "only to be beat by one, and dat's your ole man, Missus."

He gave his wife a smacking kiss, and she expressed her opinion of Nellie in a word with which printers are seldom troubled. Their point of view was bitterness to Sally. They knew—every one knew—that this woman was not Stanger's legal wife, but they treated her exactly as if she were his by every bond of law—her disloyalty was just as hateful in their eyes. It would have been the same with herself and Andy. Even the Joes, who had gone through the aristocratic and expensive ceremony of getting married in church, would not have looked down on her. She would have been as much Andy's wife in his own country as she would have been Moore's in his. What a fool she was! No wonder Baird despised her—she who dragged all the laws of Philistia into Bohemian territory. He had offered her marriage according to the showman's rite, and she had shrunk from it because it was not the rite of the country she had left for ever.

"I'm not surprised as he's found her out," continued Mrs. Joe. "I could have told him any day he'd asked me. She's had her game with a tidy few but somehow she took to Scotchie quite different from the others."

The conversation was getting on to dangerous ground, and Sally made haste to change it.

"What's that out over there?" she asked, pointing beyond the village.

"That's the sea."

"The sea!" Sally drew a long breath. Little Cockney that she was, even the stinging salt in the air had not told her how near she was to the sea. She had not seen the the sea since she was a child.

"Well, I'm off for a crack with Savaina," said the nigger's wife; "there ain't much time now before the place opens. I wonder, Miss, if you'd oblige me by helping my old man set out the shie. He's a reg'lar old lazybones, and 'ull be pottering round one nut till to-morrow night if some one don't look after him."

Sally was only too glad of something to do, but she soon found that fixing cocoanuts on sticks was not a task likely to engross all her thoughts. Joe, on the other hand, was so completely absorbed in it that she saw no chance of forgetting her troubles in conversation. Then, to crown all, Andy went by to the well. He passed them without a look, his hat on the back of his head, his shirt-sleeves rolled up, his pipe in his mouth—just the fat, lazy, comfortable Andy she had lost for ever.

Her regrets became complicated by an intense yearning. She found herself pining for him, dreading her life without him. She did not love him even now, but somehow he was a vital part of her existence. Life without him would be like food without salt. One does not necessarily like salt—indeed, in itself, one may find it horrid—but even a king's banquet is uneatable without it. She pictured the dull savourless days. She would meet him occasionally, of course, but such meetings would only whip up her regrets, and show her with

renewed clearness all she had lost—or rather flung away.

He would grow more and more aloof, and in the end—she set her teeth and jerked up her head—in the end he would return to his old love for Nellie Stanger. After all, on his mother's side he was of her race—she called to the vagabond in him in a way Sally could never hope to do; Sally appealed only to the nature he had acquired, Nellie to the nature he had inherited. Besides, he could not live without a woman, and he would remember the woman who had loved him faithfully, who had never choked him off with naked emotions or refused to play the game.

A kind of horror seized her. She could never, never face such an existence. Far better end the whole thing at once. Life was after all only a dust-heap of broken and tattered dreams, stinking with mystery, and smouldering with unachieved adventure. She lifted her eyes from her work and saw the sea—a still blue line beyond the trees. Her mind was full of memories of sand and shingle, silt, and brine. She had not been to the seaside since her childhood, when she had once gone with her mother to Morecambe Bay. She remembered how she had taken the white whisps of foam for hundreds of little dogs playing in the water. A kind of home-sickness seized her—she would like to see the beach again, splash her feet into the pools. She pictured the great heaving drenches, salt and cold, where even rag-pickers on life's dustheap could be washed clean. There she would lie, on the sand where no feet had trod, lapped by the waters which no hands had beaten—tasting in death the calm and cleanness she had missed in life.

The last cocoanut was set up, and Joe sat down against the caravan wheel, to rest till the business of the day began.

"Would you please tell Mrs. Joe," said Sally, "that I've been considering things, and that as she really hasn't got room for me, I don't think I'll stay on here. I—I have some friends I can go to—I think I'd better go to them; so you'll explain things to her—if I don't come back to-night."

"Don't you go leaving us, Missy," said Joe, "de ole woman 'ull be thinking I've bin saucy to yo, if yo clears off sudden like dat. Never yo bodder about room—we'll find a corner for yo somewheres."

"I'm sorry—I really think I'd better go. I—I hadn't remembered my friends lived so near, or I'd have gone to them first."

She went into the van, and took her bundle. If she left it behind, the Joes would become suspicious, and hunt after her. Of course it would be all over by then—she would be safe from their prying—but she didn't want her death to be a vulgar mystery, like her life.

She ran down the caravan steps, past the shie and the merry-go-round, into the field—and then she found herself wondering what difference her resolve would make to Raphael. Hitherto, she had seldom thought of him when he was, so to speak, off the stage; but now she began to wonder what he was doing. Would he trace her to Wittering, only to find she had disappeared? Would he live through thirty or forty years, waiting for the step of his prodigal at the door, her hand on the latch? A tremor passed through her —his love in her life had been its one clean spot.

Oddly enough, in this moment of crisis she scarcely thought of Baird. The mad joys and the madder sorrows he had brought were swallowed up in the staid raptures of Raphael's love. It was strange that a happiness at the time unnoticed should arise and comfort her now.

She walked quickly—the village was far behind, and in her ears a restless moan. She must be quite near the sea, and the next moment leaving the lane with its hedges of thorn, she saw it.

In the distance, it looked strangely mild, just a blue streak lying against the emerald of the marshes. Strange lights gleamed over it, and on the horizon were mist-wrapped islands. She ran towards it through the grass, her heart warm with the two blessed memories of her life, her childhood and Raphael's love. That was how she would die

—running, running, all the storm and choke and sob of life forgotten, nothing remembered but two sweet despised things.

The roar grew louder in her ears, and she saw the beach with its shining rim of sea-licked sand. The water was crinkled with the wind and still rolling with last night's storm. On her left the marsh stretched green and unbroken to the bungalows of Selsey—the wind sang across it like a flute, and raced with her to the beach—the shingle broke and scattered from under her running feet, pebbles rolled down with her to the sand and splashed with her into the sea—the waves dashed over her feet and round her ankles —and from her lips broke a shout of joy.

Somehow it was quite different from what she had expected. Something more than miles and years separated those rolling breakers from the little white horses of Morecambe Bay. She watched them as they tumbled round her, sucking and tearing at the sand, hurling strange sea-things out of their foam, then snatching them back again. Their song rang like the shouting of stars, to the drum of great winds that flutter and throb. It was ecstacy to curl her wet feet in their brine—her face was stung with their spray, her brain drunk with their glory. At her side was a breakwater, smashed by the storm, huge beams lying tossed like matches on the beach—there were rocks worn hollow by the ceaseless swell. A great cloud of spume burst over her, whipped her cheeks, stung her eyes, sent her staggering and splashing in the water that foamed up to her knees. Once again she shouted for joy.

"Thank God, I have lived! I have lived!"

The cry was caught up by the wind, and buffeted away to Hayling Island in the west. It was the cry of a great realization. She had lived. Revulsion, disillusion, bathos and frustration had all had part in that life, but it had been life, life itself, no counterfeiting apology. In every day of the years just past had been the stamp and roar of battle, the racket of experience. She thought of the dull vegetable existence of other girls she had known, swaddled in con-

ventions, shibboleths, dogmas, starched ideas of right and wrong. She had escaped all that. She had known to the full that clattering galloping thing called life. There might be moments of it which she regretted—but it was life—she had lived—she had not merely existed, like a turnip or a cabbage or a well-brought-up young lady.

Oh, praise the Lord for this tumbling whirling surge of life!—part somehow of the water round her knees. She was now running through the surf, her arms outstretched, her head thrown back, her whole body romping with the sea. The waves roared into her ears, the splash of her legs was rhythm, the sob of the wind was music—the very sunshine seemed full of sound. For one brief moment the world was nothing but sea—the sight, the sound, the smell, the touch, the taste of sea. Then suddenly she flung herself down in her would-be grave, and laughed loud and long and madly, the waves breaking over her shoulders and filling her mouth with brine.

She had lived—and she would still live. Thank God she saw it all clearly now. This great cosmic glory of water and light to which she had brought the petty sorrows of her heart, had shown her what a fool she had been to sit down with her shards and shreds. She would arise and pick up boldly what she had let drop out of folly and weakness. All was not over because she and Andy had had an idiotic misunderstanding—life swept such things away as the sea swept the pebbles from the shore.

She had come out to seek death, and had found life. Who can stand against life, the green sea that tumbles round one's limbs and tears up like matchwood the breakwaters one has built?—There, kneeling drenched in the surf and spray, Sally surrendered to life.

CHAPTER XX

THE GLAD SURRENDER

She stood on the shore, the water running from her clothes, her face ruddy with the salt that prickled it. She did not feel ashamed of having changed her mind—the sea had made that as inevitable as to change her clothes.

Her bundle lay on the sand, and quite near was a little shed. She did not want to attract attention by going back to the Show in her wet clothes, so she went into the shed and changed her blouse and her stockings, laying aside the wet salt-smelling garments tenderly. She unfastened her hair, shook it out and brushed it, then coiled it up neatly, noticing how the brine had made it curl.

How petty all her former considerations, loathings, and longings seemed now, as she walked back over the marsh! Her heart beat with throbs more sickening than in any of her rapturous terrors during the past week; but her mind was made up—there lay the whole difference. Now that her heart was fixed it might beat as fast as it liked.

She walked quickly; hesitation, mental and physical, was at an end—the question-mark was removed from her life. Noon hung over the marsh; the haze was thick on the Old-watering, and softened the reds of Selsey far away. The birds were silent, and the wind had carried off the moan of the sea. Sally smiled to herself as she came to the village, remembering in what agonized chaos she had passed through it an hour ago. A tune drifted towards her; it was the music of the merry-go-round, its tiny seed of love still flourishing. Stanger's was evidently conservative in melody, for the Fat Lady's organ still played the Lost Chord, though several notes had been silenced by the recent damp.

The damp had also affected the young man outside her tent, who had started an appalling cough, and wore a shawl over his frock-coat.

Sally avoided the booths, keeping on the outskirts of the Show, where tents and caravans took the place of stalls. The place was not yet crowded, but the crack of rifles came from the Thistle Range. At last she reached Andy's tent, with a brazier smouldering at the door.

She set down her bundle, and stood for a moment with her arms akimbo. The scene became burnt on her memory—the pale sky, a-quiver with misty sunshine, the peak of the tent against it, the glow of the fire. In her ears was the tinkle of a vulgar tune, punctured by rifle-shots. Somehow she felt she would never forget this moment.

Andy would soon be back to his dinner—a pot hung over the brazier; she lifted the lid, and saw brown bubbling soup. Then a bright idea struck her. Andy's things had not been unpacked, and with trembling tender hands she took them out and began to arrange them, folding his clothes, smoothing his bedding, with many a smile at the cosmos she had brought. The orderly tent was the symbol of her own mind—at peace, because it had surrendered in gladness and courage to life.

She spread a cloth outside the tent, and laid his crockery on it, preparing a meal for two. There was bread and there were oranges, a bottle of sloe-gin, and some eggs. For half an hour she was busy cooking. She was not used to cooking, except in a sloppy way, but she felt satisfied with the dish of eggs she set to keep warm against the brazier. Then she remembered something, and ran off to the hedge, where she picked handfuls of tansy and red leaves, to set in a yellow jug. Then she looked down at the meal on the grass, and clasped her hands. Oh, ye gods, what a fool she had been! But the past was all blotted out, an irrelevant phantasy, and the future was nothing but a huge adventure burning down the years.

Noon sank deeper on the scene; very softly it hazed the booths and caravans and muffled the vagabond din. It caught

up the smell of the field and sent it steaming to Sally's nostrils, mingled with the smoke of the brazier. She wondered why, in spite of the sensuous heat, her hands were so cold. This throbbing of her heart must be exhausting her, even though it no longer sickened and terrified.

At last a step sounded on the grass; Baird came round the corner of the tent—he stopped abruptly, and stared at her.

She stood up. "Andy—I've come—I can't live without you."

"Sally!"—he did not hesitate, but seized her in his arms —"my dear precious girl."

She could not answer; she was clinging to him in an abandonment of terror and necessity, like a child clinging to its mother. Then she burst into tears.

"Oh, Andy—Andy—what a fool I've been! Oh, how I've suffered! . . . I've been in hell, Andy, the worst hell of all —the hell of those who want to do wrong, but don't dare."

He sat down, and took her on his knee.

"Come, hoots, dearie! dry your eyes"—then, as she went on sobbing—"for heaven's sake, Sal, don't cry so. People will hear."

"I tried to throw myself into the sea," she wept, "but it—it wouldn't have me."

She felt him clasp her more closely.

"You poor bit thing! Was it really as bad as that?"

"Oh, quite! Andy, may you never know what it is to be a fool like me!"

"Amen," he ejaculated piously. Then, for the first time noticing her preparations: "Great Scott, Sal, you've been spreading yourself! Flowers, too! I say, old girl, you make me feel like Bayswater."

"I've cooked you some eggs, Andy."

"Thank 'ee, Missus." He stopped suddenly, and kissed her. Impulse was so strong, that she tore her head away, but suddenly remembering the new state of affairs, turned her face to his and for the first time met his lips fairly. He

kissed her twice, first tenderly, then more roughly, with what struck her as an air of ownership.

"And now we'll be having our dinner—the Show's pretty full, and I mustn't stay long away."

To her surprise she found an intense relief in this sudden descent to the commonplace. She sprang up and took the eggs off the fire, realizing for the first time that some of the chief thrills of the new life would lie in his everyday aspect of eating and drinking.

The eggs were not very nice, having been cooked too long, but Andy was not fastidious. Sally could not eat much, yet the meal was delicious to her, always to be remembered. When it was over, Andy mixed some hot grog, which they drank out of the same glass. Then he got up and stretched himself.

"Must be off now, lassie—take care of yourself. By the way, have you got your things here?"

"Yes, I brought my luggage with me." She looked up half-laughing into his face. "Are you glad I've come?"

"Glad! Good Lord! Why, you're the light of life to me, Sal. It fair broke my heart to see you tied up in your beastly old strait-waistcoat of a conscience."

"Do you tie up lights in a strait-waistcoat? I hope that isn't a simile from your article on gipsy funerals."

"No. I've taken it from my article on gipsy marriages."

She tore up a handful of grass.

"Andy—I—er—Oh, I mean, what do you want for supper?"

"Taters, Missus; and see that they're floury."

He strolled off, leaving her rolling his last words under her tongue. Her adventure was showing lights she had never imagined when contemplating it from afar. Then she had thought its chief thrills would lie in its wildest moments, now she saw that the great difference between this new adventure and the old was that its most commonplace aspects were the most glorious. No burning vows of love would be half so full of joy as that "Taters, Missus, and see that they're

floury"; no kisses would be half so full of mystery as the wayside meals, the little familiar jokes together.

She tidied up the dinner, and washed the dishes, then flung down to rest. She felt worn out, the violent throb of her heart was exhausting her; she wished her body would take its lesson from her mind and be decent and calm. But it persisted obstinately in its commotion; her heart thudded like a hammer against her breast, and shudders poured like cold water down her spine.

She wondered how she could ever pass the hours till that blessed moment when it was time to cook the potatoes. She found the proofs of one of Andy's articles, and with these on her knee, watched the sun glide down towards the gaily-striped roof of the merry-go-round, then dip behind it. Lights kindled among the booths, and soon the evening was glowing as if with a conflagration. This was in front of her; behind her the darkness slid up the field.

A mysterious sadness seized her, a sadness which was part somehow of the jigging gaiety of the round-about tune. In her eyes rose tears of sorrow, pleasure and dread. She scarcely knew whether she felt a joy tickled with grief and apprehension, or a grief fermented with delight.

Andy would not want his supper till nine, and she could not nurse her restlessness till then. Her adventure had snatched up the world to its throne; the lights and music of the Show were scarcely real, they were part of an intoxicating dream. The only thing that was real was that darkness creeping from the hedge. She found herself half afraid of it, and rising suddenly went towards the dream of glare and jingle. Though not yet seven, the light had left the sky—the air was thick with the smell of fires, the beginnings of frost and the shreddings of mist.

The Show was full. Men, women and children wandered from booth to booth, wondering, admiring, grumbling, perspiring, as the humour took them. The cocoanut shie was densely blocked, and Joe the nigger's face ran with perspira-

tion, while his wife had undone an alarming proportion of her dress. Emmanuel Horsley's voice shot polysyllables over the din, through which cracked the rifles of the Thistle Range.

Sally avoided the Joes. She did not exactly know how to explain her position in words suited to their earthly comprehension, neither did she care to shut up the infinite thrill of her life in the finalities of speech. Andy was surrounded by a chaffing crowd of gipsies and farm lads. Old Stanger was nowhere to be seen, but turning abruptly from the rifle-range, Sally ran into Nellie, who was trailing along a dirty child. In her raptures Sally pitied this woman flung aside. Nellie might be a scoundrel and richly deserve her fate, none the less she was a woman who loved and had suffered. Rather uncertain how to approach the mother, she stooped and spoke a few words to the child, putting a penny in its hand. "Thank you kindly, Miss," said Nellie, rather to her astonishment. Somehow her affability struck a false note, and killed generous feelings. It smacked of the undignified.

Sally made her way to the merry-go-round. Rhythm would help her soul by soothing her body. She swung astride one of the painted ostriches, and waited for the machine to start. The glare was so bright that she could see the booths as plainly as in sunshine, and the faces of the crowd that jostled among them. She found her attitude towards these hot perspiring creatures full of sympathy. The men, staggering under the weight of children, the women with their hats pushed awry, all were part of the great adventure that had transfigured her life; they knew the ecstasies of common things.

A short distance from her stood a man in a hideous check suit, of a huge and screaming pattern, the essence of vulgarity and misfit. The adventure cast its glamour even on him, and Sally found herself hoping he would win the hideous green and yellow vase which Emmanuel Horsley was raffling. It was just the thing a man in such a suit would like.

"Ladies and gents, I have the pleasure of displaying to your view an ornament which would redound to the credit of a prince's mantelpiece. Only two tickets remain unpurchased—24 and 27—and these I am willing to dispose of at the absurd price of one penny each. Here you are, my lord —here's your chance. Take them both for three-halfpence. We are unable to commence till these are disposed of."

The man in the check suit hesitated, but the crowd stared expectantly and menacingly at him, and he took the tickets from Emmanuel's outstretched hand. The showman gave a spin to the revolving dial in the middle of the stall; the hand sped round, and stopped at number 24.

"He's chose a lucky number," said Sally to herself, "my age!"

Emmanuel Horsley rose to the full dignities of the occasion. With a low bow, he handed the vase over sundry heads, much twisted on their necks to see the recipient's face.

"I congratulate you, my lord; you are indeed to be congratulated. You have now a possession with which, if I may say so, it would be an honour to be buried. But meantime," he added archly, "take it home and present it to your young woman, and I will wager that however contrary she may hitherto have been, she will relent at the sight of this."

The man took the vase, and turned away, carrying it awkwardly between his hands. The glare of the houp-là stall shone full on his face. He was Raphael Moore.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MERRY-GO-ROUND

Their eyes met, and it seemed as if that glance must transfix every one; it was surprising that the crowd still strolled and jostled, and that Emmanuel Horsley still defied the Lotteries Act with flowers of speech. Raphael looked very different from the night before. His face was smoothly shaven, his hair sleekly brushed, and his suit, though painful in many ways, was neither ragged nor dirty. However, of the two staggering transformations she had seen, Sally found this the most difficult to account for. Raphael dirty was easier to imagine than Raphael vulgar.

Then suddenly dismay was succeeded by contempt—for the innocence of Providence in this fresh assault. For the first time she saw a certain guilelessness in the Elohim; this was a child's plan, simple and ingenuous, yet carried out with a kind of swagger. Was the check suit, she wondered ironically, part of the idea?

The vase supplied her with her greeting—the devil had entered into her.

"So you've taken Emmanuel Horsley's advice and you're presenting your prize to your young woman, feeling sure she'll relent at the sight of it?"

He looked up at her forlornly, still holding the vase, and she could have eaten her tongue. But she was too desperate for compassion; an awful fear seized her that now at the last moment she was to be cheated out of her adventure. Of course Raphael could not persuade her against her will, but she was frightened lest he should make her repent, and turn from her happiness of her own accord. Her first impulse

was to get him away, her second and strongest was to find out why and how he had come.

"Why have you been following me?"

"I—I had to."

"Were you singing outside the George at Mundham last night?"

"I was."

A cold thrill went down Sally's back, and once more she found refuge in flippancy.

"I'm glad to hear it, for really I'd begun to have doubts as to my sobriety. Either I was drunk, or you were, and the latter was so unthinkable that I had to fall back on the other."

"I had no choice," said Raphael; "I had to get food somehow."

"Now look here, I want you to explain. I did all my explaining handsomely when I wrote that letter, but you come and dump a lot of mystery into my life—which is just as bad form as to dump an unknown baby on a person's doorstep."

He flung up his head.

"Sally, I've walked miles and miles to see you. I found I couldn't trace you if I lived and dressed respectably, so I went on the roads as a common tramp. I've had all sorts of experiences—I've slept in barns and in a common lodging-house, I've fought——"

"You've what?" shouted Sally.

But Raphael had evidently been overpowered either by modesty or by embarrassment, and would say no more.

"And may I ask," she continued, "if your present attire is part of the same plan?"

Raphael blushed.

"Some people at Selsey were kind enough to take Neddy and me into their house, and they lent me these things to wear; it was very kind of them—they meant well."

"Is Neddy at Selsey now?"

"Yes. He has a bad chill, and will have to keep in bed for the next few days."

"I'm so sorry; but really, honestly, Raphael, I'm not sur-

prised. In plain language, what the devil made you haul the poor little brute about like that? I wonder he isn't dead."

"I—I thought he might persuade you——"

"He! — when you couldn't! — You're very humble, Raphael."

"Don't you want to see him?"

He had gingerly set down the vase, and had come quite close to her. She felt he wanted to touch her, for he put out his hand, then drew it back.

"Don't, Raphael," she said huskily.

"Don't what?"

"Don't look at me like that."

Before he could reply the merry-go-round gave a hoot, and all the grotesque birds and horses began to revolve. Sally sailed off, and Moore was left staring after her, while Stanger's roundabout asked them—

> "If I planted a tiny seed of love
> In the garden of your heart,
> Would it grow into a great big tree some day,
> Or would it wither and fade away?"

Sally did not know whether she was glad or sorry at the interruption; the conversation had shown a tendency to become embarrassing, and at the same time she was feverishly anxious to hear more of Raphael's adventures. Whom or what had he fought, for instance? Even if it was nothing more material than a sudden craving for alcohol, it put him in a new light—haloed him in a new radiance of human weakness.

To her surprise she suddenly found herself opposite him again. She had been carried off so inevitably, that somehow she had never thought of coming back. There he stood looking up at her with that straining wistfulness which one so often notices in the eyes of short-sighted people. She found herself wishing he would go, even with his story untold.

The machine was moving more quickly now, the tune came faster, and the beasts and birds were higher. Sally was round again, and this time Raphael spoke—

"Haven't you got tired of it all by now?"

"Of course not!" she retorted, and whirled out of view.

Quicker and quicker—the tune was nearly lost in the swiftness of its gabble. The engine hooted, and she was back.

"Do you love that man, then?"

"No."

She was high above his head; he could see the sole of her boot as she swung past him.

When she returned they both shouted at each other simultaneously, and the words were lost.

Next time she had all the luck.

"Do you seriously think I'd have gone away if I hadn't meant to keep it up for more than a week?"

When she came round again neither of them spoke.

Next time her tone had changed—

"I wish you'd tell me more about your adventures—what did you fight?"

"A blackguard."

A loud hoot—loud shrieking—Sally had to shout when she came back.

"Did you lick him?"

"He licked me."

More clamour and jingle. "If I planted a tiny seed of love . . ." Then—

"I'm sorry."

"I'm glad."

"Why?"

A little slower now; she had to wait some time for their next meeting.

"Why?"

He held his tongue, and she was carried off fuming.

Slowly and more slowly. Then—

"Why, Raphael?"

He coloured.

"Because I—I enjoyed it so much, that if I hadn't got jolly well punished I should have been wanting to fight every fellow I met."

The machine had stopped. For a moment Sally sat rocking with giddiness in her saddle, then she stared at Raphael and whistled.

"My good man!"

He went resolutely up to her.

"Look here. I haven't come all this way to talk about myself. I'm going to talk about you; I'm going to take you back to Towncreep."

"Indeed you're not."

"Then you shall tell me why."

She was startled by the decision of his voice and eyes. The mild deferential Raphael seemed very far away from this blazing creature in the vulgar clothes. If she was to hold her own against him some swagger was necessary.

"My dear man, why do you persist in talking as if it was a hardship for me to be here? You ask me why I won't go back with you—the answer is quite simple—I'm perfectly happy where I am. You talk as if Andy had forcibly carried me off. I tell you I went away with him of my free will. I chose to go away, and I don't regret my choice. The only thing that worries me is you—when you're gone I shall be in bliss."

His reply was very different from what she had expected. The sharp flick of her tongue seemed to have driven him back into his old meekness.

"Dear Sally, I know you don't care for me any more, but I still care for you, and I ask you for the sake of what I feel now—and of what you felt once—to let me know if I can help you. Please don't hide anything. . . . It's so difficult for me to express my meaning—but I—I want you to understand that—that I'm not here to judge you. . . . That if that man has wronged you in any way . . . any protection which my name or my—my love can give you—why, it's yours, Sally, if you will take it."

She hardly knew whether to be touched or irritated.

"My dear Raphael, didn't I tell you I was happy? Then why do you persist in talking as if I wasn't?"

"You can't be happy!" he cried. "Oh, Sally, I do know you a little, in spite of all you say—and I know you can't really be happy with that man. You may think you are, but you can't be really, and soon you'll find it out. Oh, Sally, my darling, my pretty darling, come home with me; I don't ask you to marry me, I don't ask you to love me. I don't ask you to see me again after I've taken you somewhere else. I only ask you to save yourself from wretchedness—for the sake—for the sake—of something that is dead."

He had thrilled her at last; she could not help it; she had never seen him in such a frenzy of appeal. But he had not changed her resolution, all he had changed was her attitude towards him. Somehow she felt more as if he was a human being, instead of a mere stage-character in the drama of her life. At any rate she saw that she owed him a decent explanation.

"You can be quite sure that I've counted the cost, and though I know as well as you that it may cost me dear, I would rather pay heavily for my experience than have no experience at all. You don't seem to realize what an absolutely vital thing experience is, and as it's very seldom given away—well, I must pay for it, that's all. Oh, Raphael, I shall go through this life but once, and I must have my experiences and my adventures—now. What am I here for if it isn't to get experience? There are things on earth which we shall never find anywhere else, even in the highest heaven. I'll pay for them, whatever price is asked—I shan't be a coward!"

His eyes flashed as they stared up at her.

"Yes—but what do you call experience?—mud, misery, all that sort of stuff. That's not the only sort—there's loving—you don't love—then it's no good experiencing anything. It's like buying furniture with no house to put it in."

"Great Scott, Raphael! How strange you are to-day! How different from usual! Why, you support my case. You've had an experience, and look what it's made of you! You've had an adventure—and it's saved your soul."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Sally dreamily, "that there's something rather strange, rather beautiful about all this. You came out to save my soul—you have failed; but in the struggle—I shouldn't wonder if you hadn't saved your own!"

Moore was speechless. He stared at her, and for the first time she saw actual rage creeping into his eyes.

"Yes," she continued, "I shouldn't wonder if all this hadn't been the making of you—given you the shaking up and the dressing down——"

"My God, Sally! This is the limit."

"How nicely you swear! It's just as I said—*you've saved your soul.*"

"All aboard, ladies and gents; she's starting this minute—"

The screech of the engine told of an approaching interruption. Sally grinned in triumph; somehow Moore had worked her up to the highest pitch of malignancy. But she had not realized the force of her own words. Raphael, in his state of salvation, was capable of that which the Old Adam would not even have contemplated. She saw the glare of desperation in his eye, and the next minute he was up beside her.

The ostriches were in pairs, but the fact had hitherto seemed negligible, for who would have expected her High Church widower to make a guy of himself among a crowd of screaming yokels? A sudden panic seized her, and she tried to slip off, but the machine had begun to move.

"If I planted a tiny seed of love
In the garden of your heart . . ."

"You'll soon wish you were off this,' said Sally spitefully; "you'll feel dreadfully sick, and you'll be far too giddy to speak to me—that's one comfort."

Raphael evidently found silence the most dignified reply.

"You're angry with me because I say you've saved your

soul. I tell you it *is* saved—you've sworn, you're been rude to me, you're riding on a merry-go-round, your clothes are hideously vulgar and don't fit you. You're saved! You're saved! You're saved!"

At last Raphael dared lift his eyes from the neck of his steed and fix them on Sally. She was not a lovely object; her face was puckered with a dozen wrinkles of evil delight, and for the first time he realized how excellently it would be suited by horns. He felt madly, uncontrollably angry with her. He had not tramped after her all those miles to be told patronizingly at the end that he had saved his soul—told by that little baggage, too, elbow-deep in every kind of lunatic villainy. He had expected to be resisted by his Lost Sheep, fled from, perhaps abused—but not patronized.

"One would think," he said furiously, "that you were in the right of this affair, and that I'd been a blackguard as well as a fool to come after you."

Sally was furious, too, but somehow she mistrusted her rage, seeing in it a danger, an enemy. She must calm herself at all costs; at the same time, words rose to her lips which she could not control.

"I'm not trying to justify myself, but before you and I part for ever, I want to show you that I'm not entirely to blame for all this. If it hadn't been for you I shouldn't be here now—now don't do that or you'll fall off. Please don't think I'm fumbling after anything so cheap as an excuse—I don't want an excuse, I pray the gods to grant me the courage of my sins—but for your own sake, in case you ever fall in love with any one else, I must tell you that if you'd shown a spark of real understanding and sympathy on the night of our engagement, all the Andy Bairds in the world wouldn't have got me away. Don't contradict; it's true—you failed me, Raphael, failed me at a most vital moment. And now you come after me to save my soul, and you're surprised because I don't fall grovelling and tearing my hair at your feet, and let you carry me home over your shoulder to show the neighbours. You don't understand that the first point

to be observed in saving another person's soul is to realize your own consummate cheek in doing so."

"You consider my coming after you 'consummate cheek'?"

"I do, but I shouldn't have minded if only you'd realized it."

"Sally, I didn't come here to be lectured by you."

"No—you came to lecture me."

The machine was slowing down with a series of bumps, and Raphael was too busy holding on to reply. At last it stopped, and he slid to the ground, dignified in the face of fearful odds.

"Good-bye, Sally."

"Are you going? Yes, I suppose you'd better. All this hardly makes for edification. Give my love to Neddy, and—and think charitably of me sometimes."

Another tide of wrath surged up in him. He came close to her, and laid his hand on her leg, the only part of her he could reach. She kicked, and he dropped it.

"Which is worse—for me to fail to understand you, or for you to despise me? There are limits to what I can bear; you needn't be afraid of my troubling you again. I've done my best, and it's useless——"

"But it hasn't been wasted. You haven't saved me, but you've done better than that. You've saved your own soul."

"Oh, damn you!" shrieked Raphael, and fled.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CHANGELING

Sally stared after him with a puckered forehead. The gap between herself and Raphael had never been so obvious as now, and yet, somehow, its very obviousness gave it a different, more uncertain aspect. She seemed in one gasp of feeling both to hate him and to understand him. She stared till even his fiery suit was lost in the crowd, then she dropped her eyes. Well, he was gone, and the mystery was explained, though its explanation, she realized abruptly, was the most mysterious part of the whole thing. What was the love which could have shown Raphael that his best way was not the way of decency, but of degradation? What was the love which, having shown him such a way, could have made him take it? Her hands suddenly grew cold. For some time Raphael's love had been a commonplace, but never till now had she imagined the full depths, the full heights, all the hungry expanses of the devotion she had spurned. And she had sent him away. Well, what else could she have done? Her mind was made up, and the last attempt of Providence to unsettle it had proved a naïve fiasco. But in spite of the sorrow she had brought him, he would, because of her, go through life a stronger and a better man. Her faithlessness and cruelty would but make a good man greater. Face to face with such an idea, she, to her surprise, began to cry.

But the merry-go-round had started again, and a rushing wind dried the tears on her face. Round her crowded all the symbols of the life she had chosen—shouting, glare, confusion, a tinkling tune. Her qualms were killed in racket, her body rested in a whirl of motion. Just as the machine

began to slow down, some words shot into her brain—"Taters, Missus." It was time to get Andy's supper ready. Once more her spirits rushed up to their old high ecstasy. The merry-go-round stopped and she slid off; for a moment she staggered giddily, then turned towards the back-waters of the Show.

"Hullo! He's left his vase!"

The green vase stood despised and forsaken on a ginger-beer box. Lights from the various booths poured into it and glowed from its facets—and suddenly, for a moment, it appeared a gleaming glorious thing, almost unearthly in its light and colour. Sally remembered how Raphael had carried it, in the careful yet awkward way she had noticed before and loved. It was the symbol of the life of poverty and hideousness he had adopted for her sake—it was the symbol of the essential guilelessness of his nature. Poor Raphael!—he was hardly pleased that his own soul had been given him instead of hers. Poor Raphael! . . . Oh, my God!

For a moment the booths swam in a fiery mist, and Sally clutched at her heart. She was stabbed by a sudden, mortal fear. Was it perhaps true that Providence had not been so naïve in strategy as she had thought?—that this meeting with Raphael had been something more than a clumsy appeal to her sentiment? Had a new and infernal thing come to complicate—perhaps overthrow—her adventure? She had never, never foreseen such a tragedy as this. For an instant her house of resolution seemed insecure, and none of the many realizations which hitherto had shaken her castle was so appalling as that which assaulted her now. She would not have thought it possible—at the last moment, too.

She was desperate. She saw that she must pull herself together—or she would lose her adventure, her great experience. Half-forgotten words rang in her memory—"the dawn of Nothing—O make haste!" She dare not, absolutely dare not fling away another chance. A great resolution seized her. Nothing should come between her and her adventure—no song in the night, no young man on a merry-go-

round, no untimely birth of love. She was overpowered by a sick hatred for all the trumpery things that had gone to make her weakness—she stepped back, and with one fierce kick sent the vase flying in smithereens.

So much for any forlorn hopes of Providence!

With head erect and chest thrown out, she marched to the back of the Show. She had triumphed—she had hurled herself back into her adventure. Once more the savour of it poured into her life, throb, choke and thrill, purified by the sweet fixedness of a heart surrendered to the mystery of common things. The glare of the Show had left her burning eye-balls, its music no longer hammered in her ears; the crowd with its crush and stare was gone, and before her was only the dark, sweet-scented with grass, troubled with vague winds that sped and throbbed.

Andy's brazier shed a faint glow on the fogs that hovered round it. She came softly over the turf, a curious mingling in her heart of "going-to-the-dogs" and "going home." Then suddenly she stopped. Voices came from the tent—Andy's and a woman's.

She stayed a second without moving, then hurried forward to the tent door. Andy stood in a ray of light cast by the brazier, his hands on Nellie Stanger's shoulders. The dirty child hung on to its mother's skirt, and sucked a stick of liquorice. Nellie was not crying, indeed she was laughing; one of her hands rested on Andy's arm, and her eyes looked impudently into his. For a moment rage, disgust, and disillusion nearly flung Sally upon them like a fury, but pride came to her rescue—she would not make a scene before another woman.

Then suddenly Andy stooped, caught Nellie to him, and covered her face with kisses. With a stifled moan Sally shrank back, leaving them in each other's arms.

A thousand years later by her feelings, two minutes by her watch, Nellie came out and strolled away, dragging the dirty child. For a moment Sally hesitated whether she should not run away too, and leave the whole black thing to

work itself to pieces without her. But her fighting instinct was strong—she had done and dared too much to run away; this was a case for a battle, not for flight. She walked quickly into the tent, running into Andy as he came out of it.

"Hullo, Sal!"

He caught her in his arms, but she wrenched herself free, and confronted him, too indignant to speak.

"Lord!—what's the matter?"

"I—I've been waiting outside the tent five minutes."

He understood.

"Well, you saw something you weren't meant to see—that's all."

"Yes," said Sally, "that's all—and it's all over."

"My dear girl!—what nonsense you talk! I'm sick of telling you this isn't West Kensington—surely I can be decently civil to an old pal, according to the customs of her people, without your coming and kicking up the devil."

"Look here, Andy—I was fool enough to believe you yesterday, but you're getting too much for me now. It's no earthly use your pretending you were only being civil to that woman—I saw you, and I'm not such a crass idiot as to take what I saw for mere civility. You love her, in spite of all you've sworn to me, and you actually make love to her after I've come to you and—and put all my honour in your hands. I've chucked off my last rag of reputation, broken my last link with decent people and a decent life—and you—you go and forsake me for another woman——"

"You little fool!—with your eternal talk about 'forsaking.' I tell you I haven't forsaken you—I'm as much in love with you as ever. Surely you don't expect me to chuck all my women friends——"

"She's not your woman friend! Good God!—what a simpleton you must take me for, if you imagine I believe a single one of your lies." She checked herself abruptly, for she saw how undignified the whole scene was becoming—just a common tramps' brawl, with faces flushed and voices raised, unsubtle retort and crude invective. She struggled to

bring it to higher levels—"Look here, Andy, I beg you to treat me for once like a sensible being, and not stuff me with silly yarns you know I can't believe. I saw you holding Nellie Stanger in your arms, I saw you kissing her—violently, passionately . . . only a few hours after I'd offered myself, and all I had, to you . . . it isn't so much your falseness that hurts me as—as the awful insult—the smirch—of it all. You've shamed me—you can't imagine how your love for this woman has degraded me. It seems as if—as if you didn't care twopence whether I was yours or not."

"That's not true, Sally. You don't understand. I love you with all my heart, and I fully—I reverently—appreciate the sacrifice you think you make in coming to me."

"Now you're lying to yourself as well as to me—how can you love me with all your heart when you love another woman with part of it? and how can you appreciate my sacrifice when you—you—mock it?"

They were both inside the tent, in the full trickery of the brazier light—above which the Great Wain rode over the endless ways of heaven. The pause was full of the tinkling music of the Show.

"My dear girl," said Andy at last, "you speak from ignorance. You don't realize that it's absolutely possible for me to love you with my whole heart and yet to let poor Nellie have a share."

"Indeed I don't realize anything so damnable and silly. What would you think of me if I told you that though my heart was all yours, Emmanuel Horsley, for instance, had some of it?"

"There you show your ignorance again. I should have thought you'd more knowledge of life than to believe that a man's love for a woman is the same as a woman's love for a man."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, don't you see that a woman's love is for *the* man, and the man's love is for *a* woman? There's all the difference of general from particular."

Sally could not speak for a moment; she seemed to be moving in an evil dream.

"I'd have every right," continued Andy, "to be furious if you were to be unfaithful to me and love some one else, because every bit of love you gave the other man would be taken away from me; but it's quite different with me—with men. I can love both you and Nellie because I love you in different ways. A woman's love is all of the same sort, a man has distinct kinds. Really, Sally, you need enlightenment on some of the most obvious facts of life."

Her eyes were cold with scorn.

"I should think all your 'facts of life' were gathered from the halfpenny press."

"Now don't try withering me, for it won't do. I've told you the truth, at your own request, and if it's nasty, you've only yourself to blame. Of course every woman hates to hear a man can divide his love—I knew you'd hate to hear it, so I told you I didn't love Nellie; now you ask to hear it, so I tell you I do, though in a different way. I've treated you—by request—like a rational being, and the result is that you take refuge in that good old stand-by of your sex—a row."

"I ask you—do you candidly expect me to share you with Nellie Stanger?"

Andy groaned with impatience.

"Really, Sally, you're too hopelessly feminine—I argue the whole point with you, and then I find you're back at the beginning again. I tell you you're not going to 'share' me at all. My feeling for Nellie is perfectly different from the feeling I have for you. She's a woman of the people, a crude savage—you're a clever talented girl, my equal in education, my superior in birth."

"Then why don't you give her up?"

"Because I can't. There, that's blunt, and if you're the sensible woman I believe you really are, you'll appreciate it. I've tried to give up Nellie times without number—and I can't; so I'm hanged if I'll try any more. Part of me absolutely demands her, but it's not the part that demands you.

She's altogether a side-show in my life, and to prove to you the difference between my love for her and my love for you, I'm willing, if you like, to go with you to Chichester and marry you at the registrar's. There, Sal!—surely you see the difference now. I wouldn't marry Nellie if she was given away with a pint of beer."

She stood silent, with bowed head, one hand clutching at her breast. She was like a mother who goes to smile at her baby in its cradle, and finds a hideous changeling in its place.

"Will you marry me, Sal?—it's an offer."

She started from him, her hands before her face.

"No—no!—that would be the worst of all!"

She had never felt so humiliated, so ashamed, as now, when he offered her marriage. For it was marriage which, all along, had been the name of the great adventure she had contemplated. Her ecstatic vision, which had made possible her surrender to Andy, had been nothing but a reconstruction, a re-creation of the views which had torn her from Raphael. All the dreams she had dreamed of herself and Baird had been dreams of marriage, which she knew now for no dull domestic slavery, but for the glorious coupling of the thrilling and the commonplace. Excitement in common life—that was marriage, and she had not known it. What he proposed was not marriage, though all the registrars in the kingdom gave it their signature and all the priests in the Church their blessing—it was insult, degradation—it stuck to her like pitch. The Adventure for Two was not union with Andy—it was marriage with Raphael.

Back into her heart shot the realization which had made her kick the green vase to pieces half an hour ago. This time it was not mental only—it was physical. It pierced her like a sword, made her bow herself and clap her hand to her side. She loved Raphael Moore—she—the scum of womanhood, shamed, bruised, unclean. . . .

She flung out her hands towards Baird with a great cry—

"Andy, Andy!—give me back my honour——"

For a moment he looked abashed, but the next instant he recovered himself and seized her hands.

"Hoots, lass! Don't be a fool. Your honour's quite safe —with me."

"No . . . No . . . you've betrayed me, Andy—you've ruined me——"

"Nonsense! haven't I promised to marry you? Come, give me a kiss, and I'll forgive you all the journalese you've talked to-night."

"I can't."

"Yes, yes—Missus."

"No—I hate you."

"That's all your imagination—you're very fond of me really, and you're not going to be a sentimental, well-brought-up young lady, but a rational woman with broad ideas of life—and the breadth of an idea, Sal, is the measure of its provision for the weakness of mankind."

He slipped his arm round her, and drew her shuddering to him. His clasp grew tighter, and she felt his kisses on her face. He gripped her closer and closer against him, at his feet lay her dead adventure. . . . The brazier light flashed suddenly on the blade of a knife, lying with a litter of crockery on the bed. She snatched it up and thrust it into his breast.

PART IV

". . . The harshness is rough, cold and sharp, and maketh all hard, hungry, and full of anguish; and the first boiling up existeth in the anguish; yet because it cannot rise higher, therefore it falleth into a wheeling, and therein it falleth into a twinkling flash. For the bitterness rusheth and rageth like a breaking wheel, so that all falleth to be a terrible crack of fire, and flieth up. Yet when the crack of terror is thus made in the overcome harshness, thereby it getteth another source, and a shriek of great joy proceedeth out of the wrathful fierceness, as if it did awake from death. And here is nothing but the kiss of love and wooing, and here the bridegroom embraceth his beloved bride. It is not otherwise when the pleasing life is born in the sour, tart, or harsh death."—*Boehme.*

PART IV

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HIRELING SHEPHERD

A FEW faint stars lighted Raphael back to Selsey—Cassiopea swung above the mists, and Altair strove to find a mirror in salt-puddled sand. A heavy slumberous peace brooded over the marsh; there was neither love nor hate, joy nor tears, in the expanse of earth, sea, and sky, sodden with night.

The strange passivity of nature seemed to fling the turmoil of his own heart up in contrast. He hated Sally—yes, he hated her. He had never hated any one before, and it was strange that his first experiment should be on Sally, but for a first experiment it was extraordinarily hearty. There was something in his case that suggested a cynical providence—a joke on the part of the Elohim, as Sally would have said, trying to be smart and managing to be profane—he had done violence to soul and body, he had tramped in rags and degradation, he had gone comrade with filth and lunacy and vice, to redeem this little ruffian whom he believed had been committed specially to his care—and the end of it all had been a penny ride on a round-about, and a good deal more than a pennyworth of her unmentionable thoughts.

There was, however, a bright side to his rage; it filled his whole heart, and left no room for despair. He found himself facing the future stonily. He had washed his hands of Sally, he had done for her all that a man could do, and he would—he was going to say, never see her again, but, poor man, he had his doubts of that. He remembered how he had looked

on each one of their many partings as final, and each time she had come back. It seemed as if she were attached to some grotesque merry-go-round of fate, which trundled her, to a jigging tune, into his life and out again. However, his mind was made up; she might be as luring, tantalizing, as aggressively damned as ever—he would have nothing more to do with her.

It was nearly nine o'clock when he reached Selsey. He went straight to a house standing a little way back on the beach, and called the Elms, apparently for the same reason that the bungalow next to it was called Edelweiss. On the door was a brass plate, with "Miss B. Peeler. Apartments." Raphael let himself into a passage smelling strongly of wax-cloth and went down in to a bedroom at the end.

Here lay Neddy, just awake, and watched by a young woman with a freckled face and a genial grin.

"Oh, here you are!" exclaimed she, "I never knew you when you came in—clothes do make a difference! I'm glad William didn't chuck those away when he got saved."

"How's Neddy?"

"Doing fine. Doctor says there isn't anything wrong with him except chill."

Moore went over to the bed, and stared down miserably at his son. Neddy was a symbol now; he stood for all Raphael had managed to pull out of that muddle of experience—his sense of fatherhood.

"Perhaps you'll sit with him for a bit," said Miss Peeler; "William's got some friends dropping in for edification, and I'd better be there."

Raphael sat down by the bed.

"Neddy," he said when she had gone, "should you mind very much if I went home to-morrow and left you here? You're not well enough to travel yet, but I find I—I have to go back."

"Oh, I shan't mind—but what about Miss Odiarne? I thought we were going to find her."

"I've found her."

"Oh!"

The exclamation began with a delightful widening of the eyes, but a glance at Raphael's face turned joy into bewilderment.

"She's not coming home with us," said his father.

"Why?"

"That's not your affair. She knows her own business."

"Father, I'd such a queer dream when I wasn't well. I dreamed I saw Miss Odiarne standing in the doorway of one of those pubs. She was quite distinct, but of course it wasn't her really, because she didn't speak, and ladies don't go to pubs."

Raphael coloured. "Don't say 'pubs'," he reprimanded with a touch of the old cold authority. "Say 'inns'."

There was silence for a minute, then a harmonium began to wheeze in the next room—

"Mother, sitting by her fire so bright,
Thinks of her lad in the cold dark night—
Thinks of him roaming in sorrow and sin,
Longs to find him and bring him in—
So the Good Shepherd thinks of me—*ee*—
So the Good Shepherd thinks of me."

"And I suppose," said Raphael, "both Mother and the Good Shepherd should be 'realizing their consummate cheek' in thinking anything of the kind."

Neddy's eyes opened wide, and his father blushed. Good Heaven! What would Sally be responsible for next? Here he was actually startling his offspring with his profanities—"Damn!"

Neddy began to cry.

How Sally would have blasphemed if she could have seen her High Church Widower comforting his One Child, whom he had frightened into fits with his bad language! Neddy was tired and ill, and his father's strange behaviour, which had delighted him a few days ago, now made him thoroughly terrified. Even Raphael's sympathy and love had something

new and alarming about them. At last, however, he was soothed, and fell asleep. Moore went softly from the room. Supper was waiting for him, but he could not eat, and he hated his fellow-men. He would go to bed—more was, he feared, impossible.

His room was a replica of Neddy's, furnished with an iron bedstead and imitation mahogany, papered with blue and brown roses, and pervaded by the general smell of wax-cloth and stale rice-pudding. It was fortunate, Miss Peeler had said, that the lodgers were gone—"or we shouldn't have known what to do with you." The remembrance of her words soothed Raphael out of a little of his misanthropy, for they had been uttered before the two pounds telegraphed to him by Eliza Huggett put him into the camp of the respectable.

As he undressed, he planned out the empty future. He would not stay at Selsey; it was too near Wittering. He would make arrangements for Neddy to board with the Peelers till he was well enough to travel. He himself would go back to Towncreep the next day—and bury another past at Isle of Thorns.

He pictured the tall chimney, rising out of the thickets to the quivering stars, and a little vagrant sense of pathos stole into his heart. The ruin on the Forest seemed to reproach him—"Why do you always come here to bury something? to tend the grave of a dead thing? I am the place—old, broken as I am—of youth and love, of laughter and new birth. Trouble me not with your dead."

Strange to say, it was not till he was asleep that he became conscious of the nearness of the sea. While he tumbled and tossed on the mattress which "the lodgers" had worn into two parallel furrows, he forgot that the shingle was splashed and salt only a hundred yards away; but directly he passed into sleep, he found there the suck of the waves—and Sally. His dreams were sea-green, and full of her. The sea-gulls wheeling over Manhood's End cried "Sally! Sally!" and the Channel drawled her name in whispers to the sand. He

dreamed that she was alone on a rock, far off the Bill, as wet and as cold as he had been a night ago; he dreamed that a great wave drew her out of its heart and laid her at his feet; he dreamed of her lying on the shingle, tousled, alluring, but whispering, "Too late."

Till then he had never realized the full power of dreams, and when he woke he was surprised to find how these insurgents had transformed his outlook, or rather his emotions. In his heart for the first time was something akin to passion—the hatred and disgust were still there, but only as negligible external things. Underneath them rioted and beat desires that owed their strength to the flushed dream-face lifted so enticingly; dim memories of handclasps, and a soft mouth under his, threw him into a kind of giddiness, as he sat up and looked at the sun. He felt, somehow, subtly crazed, inebriate, compassionate. He found himself laughing at the furies of yesterday, though they were still with him. His sleep had revealed to him what little depth they had, and what lay underneath them.

But it was all hopeless. He was too late—his dreams were too late. The past was like a melancholy bugle-call in the dark, the future just an empty drum thudding down the years. And last week he had marched to such merry music! He found himself longing to be back in those days of dust and tatters. Then he had had a purpose in life, he had tramped merrily because he tramped to the music of a huge adventure, a glorious achievement. The achievement had failed, and the adventure had died miserably to the tinkle of a steam-organ's tune—"If I planted a tiny seed of love . . ."

He lay for some time, his eyes closed, his cheek sunk deep in the pillow. He felt listless and disillusioned: the eager desires for worship which had always been part of a Sunday's waking, were gone, leaving him just a lazy heathen, lounging in tumbled sheets. What was Sally doing now, he wondered. Hitherto, he had not given much time to conjecture—sure and self-evident facts had weighed down his imagination too heavily. After all, there was not much to

guess. It was folly to think that the inevitable had not happened, and Sally's whole behaviour contradicted such a hope. She had refused to let him help her, but, poor child, she had not denied the implication of his offer—her great need.

Then a terrible thought assailed him. Perhaps the reason she had refused to leave Baird was because, having sinned, she dared not return to the conventional prig who had frowned on her most simple doings. He realized with cruel abruptness that she might have confided in him, if only from the first he had not shown himself out of sympathy with her, wrapped up in his own decorum. After all, he had deserved her reproaches—the reproach of her letter, which he had passed over almost with a laugh for its ridiculousness, the reproach of her words, which he had spurned with disgust and anger. He had failed to understand her from the first; he had been shocked—the unpardonable sin. He had had her safe in fold, but he had used his crook too aggressively, and the sheep had fled. Base hireling shepherd!—too deeply engrossed in his white woolly proprieties to cherish the little black lamb! . . .

Somehow, his attitude towards her was changing completely; he could distinctly feel his thoughts rearranging themselves to suit a new outlook. A day's—even a Sabbath day's—hatred had not been enough to destroy his six days' labour of love. Poor little Sally! It made him sick to think how often he had failed her. He had very nearly never started in search of her at all, and when he had found her it had been only that he might forsake her again. Yes, he saw it now—he had forsaken her; that was the right name for his furious departure from the Show, for his idiotic failure to come to the heart of her tragedy, for his cowardly plans for returning to Towncreep that day. He had forsaken her.

Stung by hideous remorse and shame, he sprang out of bed and began to dress. During the last week he had become a creature of impulse, a slave of passions he would, in a normal mood, have thought insane. He hurriedly pulled on

his clothes, too much excited even to shudder at the relics of William Peeler's unregenerate state.

A voice called him to breakfast, but he thrust his head in at the dining-room door only to explain that he was going out—he had an appointment—he had overslept himself, and was late.

"Well, you'd better take something with you," said Peeler, while his sister began to cut hasty hunk-like sandwiches, "not that Trix and me ever approved of having appointments on Sunday, except with the Lord. Still, maybe, sir, He'll meet you on the way, just as He met me once. I was converted at a cinematograph show. I'd gone there in the hardness of my heart, and there I was sitting smoking and talking to gals —and all of a sudden they put on a film about growing plants. Well, bless you! I'd seen a few plants grow, but somehow I'd never taken it in till I saw it on a cinematograph —somehow I never knew they came wriggling out of their buds like that, all waving and struggling to Light. I saw 'em come out and fly up like angels, and then something went here"—and he smacked an extensive chest—"and up I starts and cries 'Salvation's got me!' and so it had, and it's never let me go since. After that I never despair of other folk, for, says I, where d'you think the Lord's most likely to be met? —why, on the way to the devil. There He stands waiting for parties He'd never catch in church."

Raphael seized his breakfast, and darted from the room. The sun burst on him as he left the house; the air was thick with salt, the smell of hot shingle and the sun-ruddy seaweed on the rocks. It was nearly church-time, and the bell of the little white-washed chapel tinkled up the street. He passed men in decent black, and girls with flowers in their hats. One or two stared after him, and giggled, but he did not care. Impulse dragged him, and reflection, when it came in due course, only lent a hand to impulse. It was true that he had changed his mind again, but custom had made that as stale as the bread he was cramming into his mouth—quite mechanically, and unconscious of the humour of the populace.

He marched up the main street of Bungalow Town. The place wore an unhelpful disapproving air. The bungalows had a look of ornate propriety, while a tall building at the end of the street, blazoned with advertisements of Oxo and Sunlight Soap, looked fussily shocked. Homesickness seized him—this was just the moment one needed Isle of Thorns. Its old age laughed and soothed and sympathized, mellow with the softness of experience; it was an old thing with a young heart, whereas Selsey was a young thing with an old heart, just what he had been two hours ago.

He wondered what Sally would say when she saw him again. Of course she would be furious—never mind, he would be furious, too, importunate, insolent, interfering, all things he hated for the sake of this child he loved.

A sudden fear seized him that she might have left the Show. She might have decided that she could not stay longer so near him . . . he strained every limb, and was actually running when he came to the beach, just where the lobster-pots begin to line the shore. He had cut across the Bill, above the Old-watering, and now left the marsh for the sea road. The sea was calmer than yesterday, just a lake of blue and light, stretching away to Hayling Island in the west, with the Isle of Wight gleaming through southern haze. The tide was out, and acres of wet sand were blue with the mirrored sky.

The road wound by a mass of rocks, and Raphael, impatient of the loop, decided to cut across them. A little experience might have saved him; he was soon slipping helplessly about on green slime, now and then finding a brief and treacherous foothold against a lump of mussels. He would have taken less time by the road, and he cursed his stupidity. A high rock rose before him; it looked of rougher surface than its surroundings, and he decided to climb it in preference to walking round it on ooze. At the same time he thought he heard a movement on the farther side; he hardly wanted any one to see him in his present plight, sprawling ludicrously on a bed of winkles. He stayed motionless for a second or two; then a voice said—

"It's all right; I shan't run away—I can't, for one thing. I promise to go with you quietly."

"Sally!" shouted Raphael.

After all, he need not have come after her; he might have known that the merry-go-round would bring her round again.

CHAPTER XXIV

SALLY WRITES ON THE SAND

"Good Lord!" cried Sally; "I thought it was the police."

"The police?"

"Yes; an hour ago I saw two constables going over the marsh towards Appledram. I thought perhaps they'd changed their tracks and come after me here."

"Why should they come after you?"

"Haven't you heard?—I've knifed Andy."

She was horrified directly she had spoken. Somehow the whole thing had become such an utter commonplace to her that she had not realized how it would strike another person. Raphael's face grew suddenly and haggardly white, the colour went even from his lips—

"My God, Sally! . . . you've . . ."

"I'm sorry—I thought perhaps you knew——"

"How could I know? For Heaven's sake, tell me everything. Are you joking?"

"You must have strange ideas of humour."

"But I don't understand you. You spring this upon me so suddenly, and you don't explain."

"I'm not going to explain."

She was standing in a pool; he was on the rock, and, owing to his short-sightedness, could not clearly see her face. The shadow of a cloud began to creep over Hayling Island, and had passed out on to the sea before Sally repeated—"I'm not going to explain."

"Have—have you killed him? . . ."

She shook her head.

"I believe he's still alive, but for how much longer I shouldn't like to say."

Something cold was creeping up Raphael's back towards his head; he managed to stop it with—

"He was trying to assault you?"

"Not in the least."

The thing rushed up Raphael's spine, into his brain and the back of his eyes.

"I told you I wasn't going to explain—and perhaps now you can guess why. It would only make matters worse. So please go. I can't make out why you're here."

"I came to find you. I was on my way to Wittering."

"Why did you want to find me?—to have another try at saving my soul?"

He coloured angrily, and she continued—

"Well, now you see how matters stand, and I hope to goodness you don't want to help me any more. Please go; you'd better not know too much about me and my doings. There's such a thing as being accessory after the fact."

"You think I'd be afraid to stand by you now?"

"No, not afraid. But I always gave you credit for being prudent."

She knew she was speaking abominably, and she knew why. His face was pale no longer. The colour was creeping up it, burning in the cheeks. She turned her head away.

"Sally, I'm not going to leave you—I've left you too often when you needed me. I know it's consummate cheek on my part to force myself on you like this, but I must—because I love you."

"Don't . . ."

"Come to land, and we'll talk things over."

"I'd rather stay here till the barnacles grow on me. You don't know what you're in for. I've committed—melodrama."

"I insist on your coming to land. I can't see your face properly if you stand out there."

"I'd much rather you didn't see my face properly—oh, don't, Raphael!"

But he did. He splashed heedlessly into the green coolness of the water, seized her, and dragged her kicking, plunging, and struggling to the rocks.

"There you are!" he said, and sat her down by a patch of sand.

"Yes, here I am—and you've shown yourself the Masterful Male and spoilt your trousers. Didn't I tell you you were saved?"

He sat down beside her, and lent her his handkerchief to dry her feet.

"Now, we're going to talk things over."

"I don't think you realize what things really are, or you wouldn't be so anxious to talk about them. I'm no longer the woman I used to be—I've committed melodrama. Fate, being dissatisfied with my turn in life's Tivoli, has moved me on to life's Adelphia, and existence is now a welter of East Lynne and the Worst Woman in London. There now, Raphael, you're looking venomous. You're shocked!"

"Not in the least—but I should like to smack you!"

"Oh, ho, for the Masterful Male! Well, smack"; and Sally held out a filthy hand, smelling of salt water.

"I know all this is put on; it's there to hide something."

She turned to him suddenly and childishly—

"I've killed Andy—poor Andy—poor Scotchie!" and she burst into tears.

At first he was disgusted. She seemed sorrier for Scotchie than for having tried to kill Scotchie. But the human thing which had been born in him somewhere between Lindfield and Selsey, told him that she had already expressed her sorrow for the action—by flippant metaphor and foolish parable—and it remained for her only to express her sorrow for the man, to carry her grief into the sanctuaries of her womanhood, where he, who loved her, could only stand and worship at the door.

He laid his hand on her shoulder while she rocked to the rhythm of despair—

"Tell me all about it, my poor little girl."

"Don't talk to me like that."

"But won't you tell me?"

"You'll see it all in the papers."

"I'd rather hear it from you. I know you've something to tell me which won't be in the papers."

"Indeed I have!—and I assure you it won't add to my credit. Oh, Raphael, won't you shake hands with me and say good-bye—without knowing?"

He struggled with himself for a moment, then said—

"Very well; you shall tell me nothing."

"And you'll go?"

"No—never."

"Then I'll have to tell you everything. I won't have your help on false pretences. Spare me, Raphael, and go."

"What would you do if I left you?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"That won't affect any one but me."

A sudden suspicion rushed on him.

"Sally, why did you come here?—to the sea? Was it to——?"

"No; I'd never try to do that in the sea. I don't mind telling you that I tried to drown myself yesterday morning, but the sea wouldn't have me. Just the opposite; I came to look for death, and I found life. That's why I'm here to-day. I felt that if only I could fetch back all those glorious thrills—all the wind and spray and bluster—existence wouldn't be so very like—so very like a splitting headache in a stuffy room. But it was no use. The sea's quite different to-day from what it was yesterday; it's calm and clear and decorous and domestic. There's no foam and fury; it won't romp with me and knock me down and drench me through. I suppose whatever one looks for in the sea, one never finds it. I looked for death, and I found life; I looked for life, and I found——"

"You found me, Sally, thank God!"

"Do you still want me to tell you things?" she asked abruptly.

"If it would make you any happier. If not, tell me nothing; but I shan't leave you."

"You don't understand," she said miserably, "but you forgive. Remember, forgiveness is only a well, and may run dry."

"I neither understand you nor forgive you, but I love you, and that's the sea."

She had shuddered every time he spoke of love. This time she flushed, and drew away from him. Then she wrote on the sand—

" 'I am a bad woman.' No, Raphael, you're not to rub it out. It's got to stay there till I've told you everything. For I'm going to tell you—you've brought it on yourself—and as I'm sure to start excusing myself that has got to stay before you all the time. Remember, there are other things to tell you besides that I've killed Andy."

"You don't know that you've killed him."

"I stuck the knife in quite far. Oh, Raphael, you can't imagine what it feels like to stick a knife into a person. I can't remember now what it did feel like exactly, but I know it felt abominable and funny."

"Where did you wound him?"

"I tell you I can't remember anything, except that for a long time after I'd done it he looked just the same as usual, and yet somehow quite different . . . and then the blood began to trickle out of his mouth . . . and he still stood there . . . and I still stared . . . I couldn't take my eyes off him. Then suddenly he seemed to crumple up, and fell down . . . but I heard him breathing quite loud . . . oh, Raphael! . . ."

Her hands were over her face, and she crouched back against the rocks. They were in the shadow now. The sun was on Hayling Island, rending it from the distance and showing it up mercilessly as a waste of golf-links and villadom. It was another young thing with an old heart, and

Raphael felt as if he must protect her from it. But his next words seemed miserably inadequate—

"Does any one know? Did any one see you?"

"No one saw me, but of course every one knows by now. I was so terrified when I realized what I'd done that I was going to cry out for help—but I heard footsteps coming—and—I realized that I'd be sent to prison—hanged, perhaps—so I seized my bundle, and ran out on to the marsh—as far as ever I could go—and then I fainted."

To his surprise, she suddenly shot out her hand, and grasped his, but just as his fingers began to close hungrily round it, she pulled it away.

"When I came to myself, I was alone with Charles's Wain. I had always thought it a big thing far away in the sky, but now I saw it was only a little thing hanging quite close to me—if I'd lifted my arm I could easily have taken the pot by the handle; but I didn't want to—I was too frightened of upsetting some devil's broth over myself—no, I'm not mad."

"And have you been wandering alone on the marsh since last night?"

"I suppose I have—but really, I'm not very clear about it. I remember that I was so wretched, wondering whether Andy was alive or dead, that I sent a little boy I met outside Goat Farm to ask at the Show. He only saw two of the Joe children, but they told him Andy was alive, and had been taken to the hospital. I gave him sixpence to tell nobody, but I don't suppose it'll be much use."

There was no longer any crying, or covering of her face. She sat with her arms clasped round her knees, staring doggedly in front of her. Raphael's heart was full of compassion like fire and wine. He put out his hand, and smoothed back her hair.

"Don't—don't! Look at the writing on the sand. I've told you how I tried to kill Andy, but I haven't told you why."

"Do you want to tell me that?"

She startled him with a sudden laugh.

"Not exactly! But I've no right to tell you 'how' without 'why.' So here goes."

For the first time, she faced him, making her eyes look straight into his. Again and again she looked away, but on each occasion she dragged herself back to meet his gaze. At last in sheer pity, he turned his head. She told him of the adventures on the road, of the adventures in the inn, of reaction and realization, and disillusion and despair. She told him of the great new adventure that had been born, and of its hideous death under Andy's feet. "And that's *why*, Raphael."

He could not answer her at first—indeed, he could not quite understand. All the tangle of motive, the riot of action and reaction which had gone to her tragedy, were beyond his slow-moving and essentially masculine perceptions. All he knew was that now he was irrevocably bound to her, no matter what she had done, no matter why she had done it. He must go to her without the camp, and bear her reproach. As for her sake he had tramped the Sussex lanes, so now he must tramp another and a longer road—Queer Street, the long lane that has no turning.

She misinterpreted his silence and his heel grinding in the sand.

"I'm sorry, Raphael; I knew what it would be . . . I wish you'd speak, though, and get it over . . . say you wish you'd never known me . . . say you're ashamed of ever having loved me."

The eyes he turned on her were full of reproach.

"Oh, Sally!"

"You—you mean to say you still want to stand by me?"

"Of course I do."

"But I'm not going to let you."

"Why?"

"Because—for lots of reasons."

"You may be sure," he said gently, "that I wouldn't bring any—any personal feeling for you . . . which you might dislike . . . into the matter."

She turned her head away.

"Of course there's only one reason for what I want to do; but I shan't trouble you with it, if only you'll allow me to——"

"No, no; this is the end."

"Sally, I can't let you face all this alone."

"But how can you help me? No"—in her excitement putting her hand over his mouth—"I don't want to hear now—I daren't . . . Raphael, Raphael, look at the writing on the sand."

They both looked. There was no writing.

"Hullo!" cried Sally, with a queer little laugh, "my 'bad woman' has disappeared."

"The sea has washed her away."

"You said your love was the sea."

The conversation seemed to have snapped, broken like a bent sword. They both smiled nervously, face to face with a new beginning. There was Beginning in Sally's eyes, where ten minutes ago there had been the End.

Raphael did not know what made him say—

"I thought you hated me?"

"So I did!—I should think I did!"

But the Beginning was still calling to him from behind tears.

"Do you hate me now?"

"No-o."

The Beginning called louder, but he still dared not answer it. He feared to take advantage of a sudden weakness on her part; he feared that terror and loneliness were forcing her hand. It was all so abrupt—like the breaking of a bent sword.

She took his handkerchief, with which she had been drying her feet, and gave it back to him. Their fingers touched, lingered—interlaced.

"Sally! Sally! . . ."

"No, Raphael . . . don't."

"I must."

"Oh . . . don't."

But the Beginning had triumphed over the End.

He held her to him, and gradually her hands crept up to his shoulders, where they lay, bringing the smell of the sea. Her face was hidden, so he could not hear what she muttered against his breast. His mouth was buried in her soft salt-tasting hair—under her heart she felt the throbbing of another heart that loved her; it soothed her into a passion of surrender, an ecstasy of trust, an abandonment of peace.

CHAPTER XXV

RAPHAEL TAKES LODGINGS IN QUEER STREET

They were roused by a wave breaking over them, a salt baptism for love. To Raphael it was all a blessed mystery, as he took Sally's hand and helped her off the rocks to the shore; to Sally it was all a blessed tragedy, an eternity of sorrow crowded into the rapture of an hour.

His arm stole round her, and they paced along the sand. Then suddenly a strange thing happened; before they knew what they were doing, they were dancing. His arm round her waist, their hands clasped, they spun round and round, their feet light on the sand. They had both danced many times before, the conventional dance of ballrooms; but that was no more like this than the clasp of their hands was like the clasp of ballroom partners. She felt his hot breath on her cheek, and when she looked into his eyes, they were dancing too. Her own breath came in gasps and laughter, she scarcely felt the ground under her feet. The whole world seemed to be dancing round them, just a great ryhthm and madness—all one music. They were part of the cosmic dance of sea and sky, and earth and air, the dance from which they had held aloof so long, but which they now danced together with flying legs and waving hair, at the bidding of the two great dancing partners, love and sorrow.

Then suddenly they stopped, and looked at each other almost shamefacedly.

"I never did that before in my life," said Sally.

"I never knew people ever did such things," said Raphael.

Again they looked at each other shyly, then walked on, their arms round each other. For the moment there was no

future, only the present, and the past in which they dug for hid treasures.

"When did you first begin to love me, Sally?"

"If I was the heroine of a novel, I suppose I should now discover I'd always loved you; but as this isn't a novel, and I'm anything but a heroine, I'll confess that I've loved you exactly fifteen hours."

"But what made you know it?"

"Somehow I connect it all with the merry-go-round; but I don't think I really knew I loved you till just a second before I stuck that knife into Andy. . . . In one gasp I realized my love and my—my awful uncleanness. . . ."

"It was his uncleanness, Sally, not yours."

"It was mine, too. Yes, let me speak. If my heart had been clean, he would never have dared treat me as he did—and there's more to be said in excuse for him than for me. He's a cross-breed and it's horribly against him. He belongs on his mother's side to a society in which such arrangements as he wanted to make are quite usual and honourable, and his proposal was only, I suppose, a reversion to type. I could have forgiven him that if the educated, sophisticated journalistic side of him hadn't rushed in and tried to explain the other half. It wasn't his suggestions so much as his explanation of them that made me try to murder him. . . . But you mustn't think that his wound hasn't wounded me . . . almost to death"; and her head fell.

"Then you did love him?"

The ignorance and jealousy of his words made her yearn towards him.

"No; but I don't suppose you'll ever understand. It's difficult for any one to realize how a man may fill up a woman's life, be the absolute all of her existence, and yet without her loving him. Andy wasn't so much my lover as my obsession. I never for a moment thought I loved him, and now that I love you I see the difference so clearly that it's hard for me to believe any one could possibly confound the two. But I can't help thinking that to understand this thing one must

experience it for oneself; so I ask you to take my word for it that I've never loved Andy—that I've never loved any one but you."

They came to a widening of the sand, and Sally shook off the more serious mood—indeed, so ghastly was the reactive gush of her spirits, that Moore had some difficulty in restraining her from drawing their two hearts, joined by a transfixing arrow.

"Oh, Raphael, why aren't we trippers? Why isn't your name 'Erb? Why aren't we going home this evening to Hackney, with a handkerchief full of winkles, to tell Mother what a blooming time we had—and 'Erb 'e didn't spoon, not 'arf."

"We shall have to go off somewhere; we can't stay here any longer. But the question is, where shall we go?"

"'We,' Raphael? You're not coming with me?"

"Of course I am."

"I don't think."

"My dear girl, it's the only way. You can't manage alone. I don't say I'll be much good, but I'll be better than nothing."

"You don't know what you're saying. Do you realize that by helping me you'll get yourself into a dreadful mess? You may be sent to gaol—think of that."

"I have thought of it, and it makes no difference. You must try and see my side of this question, Sally. Do you reasonably suppose that I can go back to Towncreep, work, eat, and sleep, just as if you weren't wandering about alone, in all sorts of trouble and danger? The thing's impossible. If you decide to run away, I must come with you."

"You're a brute, Raphael. You make me feel as if I ought to give myself up."

"I wouldn't dream of asking you to do that. I'm merely trying to explain that after what has just happened, our lives can't run apart any more—you belong to me, and I belong to you; the hurt of the one is the hurt of the other, and the fault of the one is the fault of the other——"

"No, no; that won't do at all. I'll take any advice you can

give me, and as I've no money, I shan't say I'll refuse anything you can afford to lend; but I leave this place alone."

"You don't realize that by helping you with advice and money, even by holding my tongue after having seen you, I make myself accessory after the fact."

"You wouldn't be running such risks."

"You would allow me to help you in an underhand, ineffectual way, but you deny me the privilege of standing openly beside you, and offering you my best. You can't really love me, Sally."

"I do love you. But remember: I haven't the rights of the average woman over her lover; I'm an outlaw, and I've no right to call you from peace and respectability to share my——"

"Do you think I'd care twopence for a respectability that wasn't yours too, or that I could have peace while you had none? I've no family claims, no ties, no home—I'm all yours."

"What about Neddy?"

"Eliza Huggett will take care of him till I can send for him—and he shall be brought up to be ready to do what I have done."

She stopped pacing; the strip of sand was growing narrower, and the waves licked her feet as they tumbled in. Just visible in the far south-west, a diamond in dancing haze, gleamed the Isle of Wight.

"Don't say any more, Raphael. The days when distressed maidens could accept sacrifices from their knights-at-arms have gone with the woods under the sea. I'm sorry I was so weak as to let you know I loved you. I've no right either to give you love or to take it from you—your love makes me think of the Island out yonder, white and dim and lovely, the land that is very far off."

Her voice had dropped to a whisper thick with tears. He took her hand—

"Nonsense, Sally," he said.

They had walked as far as the salt pools known as the Trulilows before their plans were made. They were quaint plans on the whole, an odd mixture of the vague and the practical, foresight and ignorance. At first Sally wanted to take the steamer for Dieppe, but Moore objected—

"I think we'd better keep clear of large towns and public places at present. We ought to lie low till the worst of the storm has blown over. If only we could find a quiet out-of-the-way corner. Sally! . . ."

"Well?"

"What if we went to Isle of Thorns?"

"Great Scott, Raphael!"

"Well, don't you think it would be a good place? It's absolutely lonely—a long way from the road—out of sight of any other buildings. No one ever comes near it. We could stay there for days without being found out."

"But surely it would be very easy for the police to track us there."

"Not if we start at once. This affair can't get about among people in general till the papers are out on Monday morning. Of course we shall have to tramp it—we'd be traced quick enough if we went by train—but it isn't really far."

"We can't stay there long; and what shall we do afterwards?"

"In a few days we shall know more definitely what course matters are likely to take. So far we don't even know whether Baird will live or die, and we've no idea of what the police are doing. We could stay at Isle of Thorns till we'd found out so much at any rate. It would be folly to go to a place like Newhaven and take a ticket for the steamer—even if we had enough cash to see us through, which we haven't."

"It's rather a mad plan, Raphael, but as you say, there doesn't seem much else we can do."

"Not at present, at any rate. The only thing we can be sure of now is the need for leaving this neighbourhood and hiding somewhere for a while. By the way, we'd better not start together."

"How shall we manage then?"

"I've told the Peelers I'm going back to Towncreep by the 2.51, so I think I may as well take the train as far as Sidlesham and meet you there."

"What about Eliza Huggett? Shall you tell her?"

"I shall have to tell her something, but she mustn't know too much—not enough to make her accessory after the fact"; and he smiled faintly. "However, I expect she's sure to read about you and Baird in the papers. Every one at Towncreep will do that, I'm afraid."

Sally groaned. "I'm afraid they will. Can't you imagine Sister and Sissy? 'Miss Odiarne's nearly killed a man!'—you know the way they say 'man,' as if it was rather an indecent word—'not quite proper, not quite nice.' Still, the papers can't tell them where I am, and I don't suppose they'll connect your disappearance with mine."

Raphael blushed. He remembered how hopelessly he had given himself away before leaving Towncreep.

"I think I'd better be getting back to Selsey now," he said. "It's past one o'clock, and the Peelers will be wondering where I am. Will you be able to find your way to Sidlesham?"

"Oh yes. I'll be skulking about somewhere near the station. Where shall we go from there?"

"Up towards Horsham, I think. Our first concern must be to get out of this neighbourhood."

"It feels just like Tess Durbeyfield and Angel Clare. Don't take me to Stonehenge, Raphael."

"Of course not," he said innocently; "how could I? But I think we'd better zigzag a little at the beginning—just to put people off the scent."

"How cunning you are! One would think you'd been doing this sort of thing all your life."

He smiled sadly. "I'm an ignorant bungler, Sally. For your sake I wish I *was* more used to it."

"Yes, I daresay it would have been better if I'd put a knife into you and gone off with Andy. But never mind. I'll be at

Sidlesham by three, ready for the zigzag; it sounds like the White City."

He looked at her nervously, and she came suddenly up to him, laying her hands on his shoulders.

"Raphael . . . I hope you don't mind all this frivolity . . . because it's—it's necessary."

"I see, my darling; I quite understand."

He looked at her again, his head a little on one side. Like most men, he had only a sketchy idea of the apparel of the woman he loved—none the less he realized that something was wrong with Sally.

"Dear—I wonder—I think you'd better . . . you know you might attract attention by being so very—er—untidy."

"Oh, I'll see I'm all right—quite fit to walk with a very respectable man. I own my present appearance is a trifle *négligée*."

Her hair was loose about her ears, an unbrushed mass, bristling with hairpins. Her blouse was open at the neck, her skirt caked with mud and ooze. Her feet were bare; his eyes dropped to her toes as they curled in the moist sand. He took her into his arms, feeling for the second time the lure of grime and tousle, and kissed her hot tanned face again and again before he could tear himself away.

He had walked only a hundred yards when he heard her panting after him, swallowing tears—

"Raphael, I'm not going to meet you at Sidlesham. I've no right to destroy your life with my own. I've taken far too much from you as it is——"

But all he said as he gently freed himself was—

"Nonsense, Sally."

CHAPTER XXVI

PLUMMERS PLAIN

At three o'clock the little motor-train from Selsey to Chichester ran into Sidlesham station. Only one passenger alighted, a young man in a crude and fiery check suit, who left the road before it reached the village, turning into a by-lane by Alehouse Farm.

Sally was waiting by a glorious patch of tansy, and rushed forward to meet him, her hands outstretched. For a moment the world was in each other's eyes; then they turned down the lane towards the marsh.

It was typical autumn weather—a day of mature and finished loveliness, of exuberant colour and proud fruitfulness, a day dashed with experience and pathos like the beauty of middle age. The air was transparently clear, and the white rims of windows far away gleamed across the marsh. The wind puffed with the luxuriance of summer heat, but held a crispness in its breath which summer had not known. They crossed the levels towards Ramskitchen; they did not speak much, for just at first Raphael's heart was sore. He had said good-bye to Neddy, and there was nothing to tell him when he should see his little boy again. Sally slipped her hand into his; she was beginning to understand his seriousness, just as he was beginning to understand her flippancy.

They had taken the northward road, which winds among dykes and osier-beds, past Waits and Sheepstand and many a mill, to the low fields about Chichester. In half an hour they had left the flats, and looked down from Muddles Farm, on the green of Manhood, splashed with the red of Bosham, Appledram, and Wittering, and the younger red of Bungalow Town. At Blackstock they saw their last of the sea.

They kept to the north-west, and the road crept higher, till at Easterfield it climbed into the Downs. They looked very different from when Raphael had last seen them, Bignor way, with Elijah the Tishbite. They were now tender with the charities of the sky—smooth, sunlit slopes, musical with the bells and bleating of the flocks that moved over them.

As the afternoon deepened and sweetened into the evening, Raphael found his tongue, and he and Sally talked gaily and impersonally enough. After all, they were both young, and it was their privilege to shake their shoulders under their burden. One cannot for ever talk of death and judgment, heaven and hell, however much one may be mixed up with those things, and Sally and Raphael found themselves talking of books and people and games, just as if they were what they looked, a very ordinary young couple out walking on the Downs.

Twilight came—but first of all the golden hour when the afternoon melts into the evening. A warm yellow kissed everything, hills, trees, cows, ponds, and cottage-roofs. In the little houses of the bottoms, tables were spread for tea, and through the open doors Sally and Raphael smelled the wood-smoke, heard the cups rattle, and saw the loaf with the sunshine on it. They themselves found blackberries, and Raphael cracked nuts with his teeth for Sally.

The warmth faded out of the yellow, and they quickened their pace. The road ran high, giving them a far view over fields, sunned and hazed to the south. The sky was clear as water, except for some clouds above the woods of Lone Orchard, which now and then shook the thunder out of their towers.

Raphael actually found himself glad to be on the tramp once more, even for such a reason. It was sweet to feel that, as night dropped over the woods, and earth and sky grew hourly darker and more free, he need not turn back into the house, drown the starlight with a lamp and frame the moon in a window. As for Sally, she had always loved the liberties of a roofless night, and the fears that had once

assailed her vagrancy were put to flight by the man at her side. She could not help laughing at the idea of Raphael, who once had been more than a little shocked at the idea of having tea with her alone, wandering about the country with an unattached female—but there were tears in the laugh.

She noticed that, physically, he was very shy of her. His arm was never round her waist; he did not even touch her hand. Just at first she had been puzzled, a little disappointed, but now she guessed his motive—all the delicacy of his nature was up in arms to protect the girl forced by circumstances into the deepest, most dependent intimacy with a man who had no immediate prospect of making her his wife. And, strange to say, she found herself liking it. Accustomed as she was to constant and aggressive endearment as normal between man and woman, she found in this new relationship of restraint something like the opening of a window. This shy comradeship, this tender aloofness, made her realize with fresh understanding the possibilities of the love which, grounded in the divinity of sex, yet keeps its independence, and probing beneath the temporal tissues of the body, makes itself immortal in the soul.

He bought their supper at a little shop, sweet with the tea-and-sugar sweetness that clings to village shops. Just before that the sun had set; for a moment the fields had been swamped in gold, then the glory had mounted to the cottage roofs, then to the Down-tops, then to the sky—then it had gone, with a little gasp of the night-wind in the hills.

The mist was steaming up in the bottoms, and the southern meadow-valley was beginning to look like the sea, with here and there a star in the white waters, showing that lamp-time had come to some cottage far away. Raphael and Sally ate their supper as they walked along. At Green Tilt they left the Downs, and came into a country of high-lying fields and commons, with little wisps of wood scattered beside the lanes.

The night had fallen, and there was something very eerie in the dark. They found it hard to think that the footsteps following them so persistently were their own. Sally found herself shrinking close to Raphael as the undergrowth whispered and little homeless winds ran sighing through the grass. The lane was pale between the hedges, and the tall tansy were like ghosts; she remembered stories she had heard of haunted roads, where strange footsteps pattered, strange women crouched weeping under the hedge, and Pharisee boys leaned over the gates in the moonlight, singing to the sheep.

She was glad when, having passed several silent, lightless farms, they came to a gate which opened on a heath.

The great plain swelled before them, grown with furze. The south was like a well, deep and featureless except where a light gleamed like a mirrored star. There was a dim radiance over Plummers Plain, showing them the secrets of wayside bushes, and instinctively they looked up to the sky. It was covered with stars, some huge and lustrous, others no more than a luminous powder. The Milky Way stretched over their heads; in the north hung Arcturus, the Waterbearer trembled in the west, and all the waste of space and mystery, from horizon to horizon, gleamed with the ageless Houses of the sky—while now and then a meteor slid among them, streaking the dark with red.

There was no wind, and the peace, not of shelter but of expanse, was so great that Sally welcomed Raphael's next words.

"Shall we stay here for the night? We'll be warm enough behind those bushes, and safe enough too."

"I think we might. I'm glad it's not too cold to sleep out of doors."

"We'd better not both go to sleep at the same time—we might oversleep ourselves and be found here to-morrow morning."

"Then let's divide the night."

"Very well. You sleep first. I'll wake you at three."

She protested, but in spite of his regeneration, Raphael still clung to the idea that woman is the weaker vessel. He found her a nook by a thicket of brambles. A little wind was prisoner in the sprays, and rustled them mysteriously, but never sent a puff to Sally's cheek as she lay down. There was no dew on the high ground, still warm with a day's sunshine, and the corner was ideal for sleep. Raphael went a few yards off to a clump of trees, and sat down to watch the night.

He felt at peace, but at the same time was conscious that his peace was bounded. The glittering sky was like a tent, some pavilion of dreams pitched over him and Sally for the night, next morning to be struck like a tent, leaving them shelterless to the wrath of man and their own ignorance. This second tramp was not like the first—paradoxically, it was less anxious and tossed, there was more of the inevitable about it, and consequently more peace. It was happier and it was lonelier, more decent and more clean—and yet there were more tears in it, and he could not feel the same keen thrills, though it ran through dangers twice as thick. For this time it was not only his body that was outcast, but his soul; a week ago he had shared Sally's vagrancy, but now he shared her outlawry. He had become an enthusiastic and expert liar—how perfectly he had lied to the Peelers before leaving Selsey!—and an equally enthusiastic, if not quite so expert, criminal. His conscience did not reproach him; on the contrary, it told him that it was now his duty to tell lies and defy the law, just as it had hitherto been his duty to obey the law and respect facts; and whatever his conscience told him Raphael accepted meekly, though here was a change of tactics that surprised him not a little. He did not like it, either—any more than he had liked being kicked by a tramp or wearing rags—the law had never looked so majestic as now that he had broken it, or a lie so black as when he had stuffed a dozen down the Peelers' unsuspecting throats. Still, he realized vaguely that Sally was more important than his private soul, and just

as for her sake he had become an oucast and a vagrant, he now for her sake became a liar and a criminal.

The night swept slowly on, the Zodiac wheeled across the sky, stars were born in the east and were lost in the west. The wind grew a little keener, and came in sobbing gusts—one of these blew Sally's hair across his eyes, as she leaned over his shoulder and whispered that she could not sleep any more.

He was persuaded at last to lie down where she had lain, but she did not watch where he had watched. A woman is, by right, in such matters bolder than a man, and Sally sat down by his side.

It was nearly three o'clock. The sky was black as a bowl of wine, but the stars still sent a dim, trembling radiance over Plummers Plain. Sally looked up to them half fearfully, half hopefully. She seemed to see her deliverance written on the face of the sky; the Wain was hidden behind the bushes where Raphael slept—the Seething Pot had vanished from her universe.

Orion hung straight before her, a triumphant, spiritual thing, and all round him was a powder of stars—never, she thought, had she seen so many as that night on Plummers Plain—Vega, Leta, Cassiopea, Altair, Sirius, Aldebaran; their names, as she repeated them softly, thrilled her like the list of ships in the *Iliad,* or the names of the patriarchs in Genesis. Their distance, agelessness, and spacelessness could crush her no longer, for Raphael had shown her, through the depths of his forgiveness and the heights of his love, that she was called by a more excellent name than they.

Towards five o'clock the sky put on a very windy look; she could imagine a great wind of space sweeping among the stars and shaking them like dangling fruit. Then a colourless light crept among them from the east; then dawn began to break in the House of the Fishes. The great galaxies paled, and Sally's eyes dropped earthward to a sleeping human face.

He lay with one hand under his head, the other palm upwards on the turf, his knees drawn up in a huddled, child-like attitude, the whiteness of the morning on his eyelids. It was the first time she had seen him asleep, and things asleep had always appealed to her. Hitherto she had looked up to him as to a being better and nobler than herself, one who would protect and sustain her weakness—now her love swelled to a sweeter fullness, for it was able to look down, and a woman's love must always be able to look down; it is only a man who likes eternally to crick his neck. For the first time the mother in Sally awoke, in all her long-hidden graciousness; the poor little wild heart, driven by so many winds, battered on so many rocks, stole into haven, as she stooped over the sleeping face and kissed it.

It looked very young in that pale, growing light. Raphael's thirty-two years sat lightly on him, and there was something pathetically boyish in those parted lips, and those strangely long lashes against the brown cheek. Sally smoothed back the hair from his forehead, stroking it in an ecstasy of tenderness; then she kissed his mouth again and again—till he woke.

He stretched out his arms, still heavy with sleep, and smiled at her drowsily, with blinking eyes. Then, only half awake, and the old aloofness shut off by dreams, he put his arms round her, and drew her cheek down to his, all warm and flushed with sleep. She crouched within his arms till he was fully awake and sat up, laughing at her shyly.

CHAPTER XXVII

STORM AND SURPRISE

For the next half-hour they were busy with their toilets. There was a pond close at hand, which served the double purpose of mirror and wash-bowl. Sally rejoiced over Raphael as he parted his hair with a pocket-comb, and struggled to smooth the creases out of his sleep-crumbled clothes. His frantic efforts at tidiness and spruceness in the face of impossible circumstances reminded her of a cat. He stood beside her while she loosed her hair. Her hair was not long, but it was very thick, and stood out round her little pointed face like a bush. Raphael was so far a reformed character that he was able to hold the great tress that ended not in roots but in a prong.

The sun was shining brightly as they left Plummers Plain, but the wind was high, screaming over the grass, and smiting the trees with boisterous accolade. On the roads the dust whirled against the hedges, but as the weald sloped towards the east, the lanes grew narrower, deeper, and moister, so that though on each side of them the hazels fluttered and leaves and ripe nuts came tumbling to the marl, Raphael's hair lay smooth against his forehead and Sally's against her neck.

They turned northward at Honey Green, and described a great loop in the country by the Surrey border. At noon they came to Golden Street, and looked across the fields to Old Surrey Hall; then they turned back into Sussex. There was a wonderful sense of safety in those Sussex by-ways, where the hedges were high, the houses scattered, the villages few. This tawny, tangled country, a trifle feature-

less to Raphael after the Forest, was like a loving heart, where the weary and hunted could find refuge till their tyranny was overpast.

About one o'clock they came to a little hamlet known as the Chidden Houses, and here Raphael bought some bread, new-baked, which they ate beside a stream without a name. Then he dipped his hands into the water, and Sally drank from them, her lips warm against his palms many times as she strove for the last drop.

There was no need for hurry—indeed, the longer they stayed in this hidden country the better. So they strolled through the afternoon, up and down their sanctuary of lanes, past many an orchard sweet with laden boughs, browsing the windfallen apples that sunned in the grass.

Towards three there was a sudden change. For some time the day had been growing yellower, and soon after they left the stream by the Chidden Houses, the universal colour became sickly and watery, moving slowly over ponds and stubble-fields, and jaundicing the white walls of farms. Then the yellow passed into grey, and at once the country caught up the colour of the sky—everything became grey, the fields, the roads, the hedges, and the trees which the wind had stripped. Raphael saw it creeping into Sally's eyes, and took her hand as they walked through the dullness together.

At Tilement rain began to fall, large hot drops, that gradually grew smaller and colder. Moore remembered the end of his first tramp, how hope, adventure, strength and comradeship had all trickled away in a stream of unceasing rain. To-day he had the additional anxiety of Sally's welfare; her jacket was a threadbare business and the rain had soon soaked through to her shoulders. He took off his coat and put it round her, and she struggled, and lost a quantity of hairpins, which he insisted on finding before she would go a step farther. He found her a troublesome child, and he had to speak sharply to her more than once, though the impertinence of her answers was discouraging.

Towards nightfall they came to a large, lonely barn, where,

as the rain was now drizzling thickly, they thought it best to spend the night. A third of it was partitioned off and filled with hay, and this Raphael decided should be Sally's bedroom. She did not like the idea—the place reminded her too much of the barn at Chelwood Common—and she lay all night with her head against the wood that divided her from him.

He did not wake her at three, for her bad temper, and the lack of relish with which she ate her supper, had shown him that she was worn out. The night was very cold, and the morning was colder. Treading softly to the barn door, he saw thick, half-frozen sleet hurling itself from a lead-coloured sky. The puddles hissed, the trees bowed, and Raphael shivered. English weather seemed to him the cosmic machinery of anti-climax.

However, he saw the rashness of staying where they were, as any one might come to the barn for fodder. So he woke Sally, and divided with her their breakfast of bread and plums.

The storm was still raging when they set out. Towards noon it seemed to hold off a little, but an hour later it came on faster than before. At last, however, they arrived at a sign-post marked "Wytch Cross"—in another hour they would be at Isle of Thorns, and there was a gleam of cheerfulness on their wet wind-reddened faces.

Their spirits rose as the country grew familiar. Gradually the fields became larger and rougher, the hedges broke down, clumps and rings of pines dotted the stretches of dead heather, and soon all round them rolled the solitudes of Ashdown, brown, shaggy and wind-swept, covered with little wisps of cloud.

They left the Maresfield road at Allfornought, and soon against the grey wrack stood a chimney, tall, dark and lonely in the fading day. The alders and thorn-bushes were bowing round it, tortured by the wind which made them dance under their burden of moisture. The whole place looked unutterably dank and forsaken.

Sally shivered.

"Ugh!—to think we may have to stay here a week! If it rains like this all the time, I shall go mad."

"It will be better for us if it does rain, as the rain will keep away the only sort of people likely to trouble us—picnic parties and such. We'll soon make the place comfortable. I'll gather some sticks before the wood gets sodden, and we'll have a fire."

"A fire! Oh, Raphael, how beauteous!—but mightn't people see the smoke?"

"We'll light it in the inner room, where the smoke won't go anywhere—except down our throats."

"That'll be like old times—like the day I asked you to tea"—a wicked gleam danced up in her eyes—"if you'd known then all the awful things you and I were going to do together, don't you think you'd have quickly and painlessly put an end to us both?"

They had wriggled through the bushes, and were on the threshold of the cottage. He went down the steps into the outer room, and turned to give her his hand, but somehow the next minute, he never exactly knew how, his lips were on her face. For what seemed long moments they clung together, two dripping shivering creatures, their soaked garments heavy against their limbs. The embrace was a surprise to them both, and suddenly Raphael dropped his arms. Sally laughed in his face, and ran into the next room, where abruptly and inexplicably she began to cry.

"Dear, should you mind very much if I left you here while I went to get food at Towncreep?"

"At Towncreep! Is that safe?"

"Every one will be out at this time except Mrs. Ewland, and we must get food from somewhere, you know. Besides, I can change my clothes, and give them to Eliza to send back to the Peelers. If I don't do that, they'll get suspicious."

"I suppose you must go; but be quick and be careful. If Mrs. Ewland once finds out, we might just as well have

the whole thing printed on handbills and distributed in Trafalgar Square."

"You must trust me—and now, good-bye, dear little Sally. I promise not to be long."

A shriek of wind greeted him on the threshold, and pellets of hail whirled into his face. Half-blinded he staggered out on the Forest, which lay in a dark hush against a screaming background of sky. The next moment the wrack scudded over it, and it was blotted out.

The darkness increased. Now and then great peals of thunder broke over Ashdown, opening with a metallic crash, then dying to a low rumbling behind the hedges. It was nearly an hour before Raphael came to Towncreep. For some time he crouched against a haystack, as there was ceaseless scurry in the yard—sheltering stock and produce from the storm. At last he managed to slip round the house, and looked in at the kitchen window. The room was empty except for Eliza Huggett, and he tapped on the pane.

"Goodness me, Mr. Raphael!"

She ran to the window and opened it, and he put his leg over the sill.

"Excuse me coming in this way, but I don't want any one to know I'm here."

"Nobody's likely to come in for another hour or so, and John's lying down upstairs, as he feels sleepy"—sleepy was a good word.

Raphael came over to the fire, and the water poured off him.

"Gracious, dear; how wet you are! You don't tell me you've been out in it all! Why didn't you let me know you were coming back?"

"I'm not coming back—just yet." He blushed in anticipation of the lies he was going to tell. "I'm on my way north. The fact is, Eliza, I've found Miss Odiarne."

"Oh, I'm glad of that——"

"Yes, I've found her; but under the circumstances, I hardly think I can bring her back here. She has scandalized

every one, you know. I'm taking her to Manchester, and we'll be married there; but till I get a fixed home and a fixed job I'd be much obliged if you'd keep Neddy——"

"That I will, sir."

"Thank you. At present he's staying with some people at Selsey; he caught a bad chill, and it's hardly safe for him to travel yet. I expect he'll be here on Friday or Saturday."

"Can I do anything for you and Miss Odiarne?"

"I'm wondering whether you could let us have some food. We've a long journey ahead of us."

"Anything you like, dear—bread, cheese, cold meat——"

"Oh, that'll do nicely. Thank you so much—and meantime, if the coast is clear, I'll run upstairs and change my clothes. These were lent me by the people Neddy's staying with, and I'd be very grateful if you'd send them back for me."

He ran upstairs to the low-roofed bedroom under the eaves, which he seemed to have left a hundred years ago. It was quite unchanged. There was Margaret's photograph on the mantelpiece and his Anglo-Catholic Churchman's Kalendar hanging on the wall, just as if he had not lost his character for the sake of a woman who was not Margaret, or heard the Lord's message from a crazy tramp. He had never realized so completely the change that had come, as now when he saw all the former tokens of an unshakable universe, robbed somehow of their meaning and their connexion with himself.

He went downstairs, and gave Mrs. Huggett the Peeler's address; then he stammered a little—

"Eliza, if—if you shouldn't hear from me for some time—you—you'd ask no questions?—you'd try not to ask them even to yourself?"

Her eyes met his serenely. "Yes, dear, I promise."

"And you'll take care of my little boy, and not let him worry about me? I'll let you hear as soon as I'm settled."

"That'll be all right, Mr. Raphael."

She gave him the basket she had packed with food. He still hesitated.

"Have you to-day's paper, Eliza? I want to look at it; there may be an advertisement I could answer. . . ."

Again the clear old eyes met his.

"I know all about the man Baird."

Unconsciously Raphael's hand shot out to the table for support.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Huggett, "I saw it in Monday's paper. That's why I wasn't surprised when you told me you'd found Miss Odiarne."

"You—you . . . have you told any one?"

"They all know, of course. Miss Evans was saying only this morning, 'I wonder what'll become of her now.' As for me, I prayed that you'd find her."

"Thank God I did! But, Eliza, tell me what these people say—what do they imagine?—do they guess she's with me?"

"No one's said much to me about it. They know I won't hear her abused, partly because I love you, Mr. Raphael, and partly because I know what the poor child must be feeling—enticed away from you and us all, only to be flung aside for a common tramp-woman."

"Is all that in the papers?" Raphael's blood boiled.

"No; only, of course, we draw our own conclusions. The prisoner doesn't deny that Baird had been carrying on with his wife, and of course one supposes——"

"The prisoner . . ."

"He doesn't deny that he and Baird had quarrelled over the woman, but he denies his guilt, though, as you'll see in the paper, he gives himself away all round."

Raphael pushed the hair back from his forehead.

"It's a dreadful thing for her, poor lamb," continued Mrs. Huggett, "and I don't wonder you want to shut people's mouths, and take her right away to where the past can't get at her through spiteful tongues. I hope there's happiness waiting somewhere for you both."

"Er—has—has the prisoner actually been convicted?"

"No; there's a remand till next week. There's some chance of Baird being able to appear then; his wound doesn't seem to be anything dangerous, though at present he's too ill to leave the hospital."

The front door opened and shut noisily, and at the same time Raphael realized that his only chance of not betraying himself was to go at once. He put the paper into his pocket, kissed Mrs. Huggett, and was out of the window just as Sister's voice sounded in the passage.

He went quickly through the yard, past the haystacks by the drive, and stopped at a small haggard, about a hundred yards from the rest. It was fortunate that he had been too bewildered to say much; brazen liar as he had become, this new development was too overwhelming for neat improvisation. He hoped that Eliza Huggett had put down his trembling hands to furies of love; he trusted her not to betray him, but for her own sake he did not want her to know too much about his affairs.

His hands still shook as he unfolded the paper, the *Sussex Daily News*. Glancing feverishly through the contents to a column headed "Wittering Stabbing Affray," he began to read—

"Yesterday, Julius Stanger, 31, proprietor of 'Stanger's World-famous Show,' was brought before the Chichester County Bench on the charge of wounding, with attempt to murder, Andrew Baird, manager of the 'Thistle Shooting Range.'"

Raphael brought the paper suddenly together in a crumpled mass, but the next minute he recovered himself, and read on—

"Late on Saturday night, Emmanuel Horsley, showman, entering Baird's tent, found him lying on the bed, Stanger standing beside him. The place showed distinct signs of a struggle; there was blood on the tent curtains, the bed, and the prisoner's hands. Baird said, 'He's done for me, Horsley.' Stanger rejoined, 'You b—— liar! You know I found you like this when I came in. . . .'"

Other witnesses gave evidence as to the bad feeling between Baird and Stanger. The latter had just discovered "Scotchie's" relations with his wife and Baird had been advised not to return to the Show. Soon after his return on Saturday morning they had met and had "words," Stanger advising Baird to "look out for his skin." On another occasion he had threatened to "do in Scotchie."

Police Constable Paris gave evidence of arrest. This had taken place at the Herring Inn, Appledram, as by the time he had arrived at the Show, in response to a summons from Dr. Grey of Wittering, Stanger had disappeared. He was arrested on Sunday afternoon. There were traces of blood on his clothes, and he was armed with a large clasp knife; the crime had actually been committed with one of Baird's table knives, which was found by Horsley on the floor of the tent.

Stanger's defence was that he had gone to Baird's tent to speak to him on some matter connected with the Show, and had found him lying in a pool of blood. He had helped lift him and put him on the bed, hence the blood on his hands and clothes. As soon as Emmanuel Horsley had taken charge of the wounded man he set out for Appledram, to meet a certain cinematograph operator, whom he wished to join forces with him. He owned that it was rather late in the day for an interview, but he wanted to avoid Nellie, who, he thought, would be in a "state" when she heard what had happened to Baird; he also realized that his position looked "ugly," and that he'd better keep out of things till he saw what course they would take.

Unfortunately the defence broke down at some of its most important points. It was not likely that Stanger would have gone to discuss "some matter connected with the Show" with a man with whom he was not even on speaking terms. It was strange that, on finding Baird wounded and bleeding, he had not called for help; and unfortunately for him it was proved that that cinematograph operator had left Appledram on the Thursday, and that Stanger knew it, and that,

furthermore, he had told the landlord of the Herring to say he had not been there.

The proceedings ended in a remand.

"Oh, my God!" cried Raphael, "so Sally didn't do it after all!"

He walked slowly back across the Forest, too deeply engrossed in his discovery even to think about it, moving in a kind of waking dream, in which rapture, doubt and relief joined in one confussion. The storm seemed to have lost some of its strength, and as he climbed higher, mist began to drop over the ridges. In a sudden clearing of the vapour he saw Isle of Thorns, rising gauntly out of the thickets; somehow the bushes were like drenched huddled mourners, crouching for protection against a tall comforter in their midst, who pointed to the sky.

Sally was waiting at the door.

"Here you are at last! I thought you were never coming."

She pulled him into the inner room, and they sat down together by the fire. He did not speak, and she looked at him nervously.

"Hullo! you've got on your own clothes again. You don't know what a difference it makes; I feel quite shy of you; you're the old Raphael once more. Do you know, I believe we owe everything to that awful check suit? If your clothes had fitted you, I should never have dared to tell you all I did."

He did not reply for a moment; then he faced her.

"Sally—has—has any one in your family ever suffered from delusions?"

"Not more than the rest of us. Why do you ask?"

"Because I—I can't help thinking you didn't stab Baird."

Sally's jaw dropped. "My good Raphael . . . I shall begin to ask rude things about your family in a minute. Whatever put such an idea into your head?"

"I've just seen to-day's paper—the *Sussex News*—and to my mind it proves that——"

"If the *Sussex News* can prove that I didn't stab Andy,

I'll subscribe to it till the end of my days. Please excuse this flippancy, but you provoke it."

"You shall read for yourself and see. Don't you think it possible that after all you've suffered——?"

"Rats! My dear boy, that's the only answer for you."

"Read this!" and he handed her the paper, rather crumpled in his excitement.

He watched her as she read. Her eyes opened wide, then her mouth. She seemed to be re-reading certain passages, it was a long time before her hands fell to her lap.

"Now, Sally," he said, filling her pause of blank amazement, "I can't help thinking this is what happened—somehow or other you saw Baird lying wounded, and the sight so terrified you that you temporarily lost your reason, and thought you had committed the crime; possibly you felt you could have killed him, and that and remorse and fright brought about a delusion, a kind of waking dream. Such things are known, I believe."

"I'd give my eyes to think that, but I'm afraid I've no doubts whatever on the subject. I can see clearly what's really happened—Andy's had a bright idea for getting rid of Stanger, that's all."

"But there's the evidence—you forget the evidence."

"I don't forget it, but I can explain it. Listen, Raphael. I believe that Stanger came along to Andy's tent just after I left it—why?—well, I'm afraid, to 'do him in.' To his amazement he found some one had forestalled him. Now a really decent sort of man may not object to killing his wife's lover under ordinary circumstances, but it's quite another matter to finish him off when he's already wounded. Stanger isn't a devil, so he didn't murder Andy; indeed, I dare say he spoke the truth when he said he tried to help him, though I don't expect he did it as if he liked it. Then Emmanuel Horsley came in, and what was simpler for Andy than to kill two birds with one stone? He probably knew what a lot of evidence there was against Stanger, and how little against me; he knew how convenient it would be to get

Nellie's husband out of the way—and—and I believe he thought of me, and how badly he's treated me . . . and he forgave me . . . because he still loved me. . . ."

"Nonsense!" cried Raphael, losing his temper.

"It isn't nonsense. What's more likely than that, when his rage cooled down, he should come to see how abominably he'd treated me? I don't suppose he'd have risked imprisonment for perjury for my sake alone, any more than I believe he's depraved enough to send a man to gaol merely to get him out of the way. It's the two together that did it."

"But you can't think Stanger's behaviour like that of an innocent man."

"An innocent man with a guilty conscience; that makes all the difference. He knew he had meant to kill Andy, and had been prevented only by some one else cutting in first. He saw, as he says, that things looked 'ugly,' so he made a bolt of it. His behaviour was, I confess, idiotic, but nothing more than you'd expect from a man of his kind in such circumstances. The whole thing's perfectly clear. Can't you see, Raphael? Andy had nothing to gain by accusing me, whereas he'd gain a lot by getting Stanger dished for a year or two, and though he knew he ran his own risks, the game seemed worth the candle; and so——But, hang it all! this is the most idiotic quarrel I've ever had in my life, and I'm dashed if I'll go on with it. I *did* stab my poor Andy, and all the *Sussex Daily Newses* in the world can't make me think I didn't."

Her fervour had convinced him. He sat silent beside her, his arms round his knees. Then he asked abruptly—

"What do you think his chances are?"

"Stanger's? He's very deep in, Raphael; he has simply rolled himself in it. The worst thing against him is his own defence."

"I suppose he'll have counsel if he goes for trial."

"Oh yes, and of course Counsel, not being a fool, will see that the thing to prove isn't that Stanger didn't do it, but that some one else did."

"Do you think you will be suspected?"

"How can I say? As far as Stanger himself is concerned, I've proved a kind of alibi. I left the Show in the morning to go to friends—apparently for good—and as he was away all the afternoon, he probably has no idea I came back."

"But other people must have seen you."

"Of course they must, but as long as Stanger didn't, I'm fairly safe. No one else is likely to accuse me. Andy's very popular at the Show, and at the same time he's rather feared; so whatever people thought they would be slow to spoil any little game he chose to play. Besides, I dare say they only thought I'd come to visit the place with my friends —I was with you most of the time, you remember. No one saw me go to Andy's tent, and I don't suppose he told any one; if he had, he'd never have dared accuse Stanger—the risks would have been too great. Of course Nellie must have known."

"Then she'll probably interfere."

Sally shook her head. "I don't think there's the least chance. If she did, Andy would never forgive her; she'd lose him for ever—she knows that. Besides, she's in the same position as he; it's more to her advantage to get Stanger out of the way than me. She hated me at Mundham when she thought I was taking Andy from her, but when she found she'd only got to share him with me, she was quite affable. Ugh! I know now why she was so friendly that afternoon. I suppose she doesn't mind sharing her men; she shared Old Stanger for years with a woman at Portsmouth."

"Then," said Raphael, speaking very slowly, "you think that—on the whole—you're now—safe?"

"On the whole. Of course, when the trial comes off, Stanger's counsel will probably have found out something about me, and may try to find out more. But by then . . ."

She shrugged her shoulders and for a moment there was silence. A dazzling realization had blinded Raphael's eyes and tied his tongue. He could make Sally his wife, give her a home—her and Neddy. He need no longer drag her

footsore through the lanes, and hear her sobbing at night on the other side of the middle wall of partition between them.

"Sally . . ." he whispered, laying his hand over hers.

Their eyes met, then suddenly each was conscious of the barrier, and, for the first time, of a certain vague distrust. She trembled, and drew back from him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MOST UNEDIFYING

THE rain had ceased, and the wind had died to an occasional whisper, which seemed to come from far away. Mist like a thick blanket lay round Isle of Thorns. At sunset it put on a ruddy glow, which deepened uncannily to crimson. For a few minutes it flushed round the cottage, casting strange lights into it—then it sank to purple—then dropped into the blackness of night.

Raphael set to work to prepare a meal, and Sally sat watching him, her stockinged feet to the fire. The conversation, such as it was, had become superficial—even eating, that uniter of hearts, could not keep it from growing more and more dull and abrupt. They both ate as if their lives depended on thoroughness of mastication, while their mouthfuls were evidently intended for obstacles to speech. Then suddenly Sally turned round, and faced Raphael—

"It's no good asking me—I can't."

"I never asked you anything."

"Indeed you did—you've been asking me stolidly this last half-hour to speak up and save Stanger from the consequences of his own wickedness and idiocy."

"You have a powerful imagination,"—Raphael's tones were strangely acid.

"Can you swear you don't see any need for interfering with our luck?"

He coloured with embarrassment and annoyance.

"Why do you ask such questions?"

"Because *you* ask."

There was a pause, and they both stared into the fire.

They were not much like a couple on whom salvation had dropped from the clouds. Raphael looked nervously at Sally from time to time. One thing was clear—she had been given the chance of escaping the last sordid consequences of her folly. It was true, as she had suggested, that when Stanger actually came up for trial, she might fall under suspicion; but by that time Sally Odiarne, tramp and scaramouche, could have disappeared without leaving a trace—she would have a clear fortnight, if not longer, to do it in. No one would be in the least likely to identify such a little vagrant with the wife of a certain more than respectable Mr. Moore—he might even change his name, join the obscure welter of Browns and Smiths. Certainly it was in his power to snatch her so effectually from her past that, even assisted by counsel, it could never reach her. But in that case, what would happen to Stanger? A suspicion which could not be substantiated would not help him much. Pushed by the treachery of Baird, he had rolled himself in such a net of circumstancial evidence that even the prompt confession of the real culprit would have some difficulty in disentangling him. Of course, he was probably guilty in intention—none the less the fact remained that he had not killed Baird, though he had had ample opportunity to do so; he might even be said to have behaved with a certain generosity.

The silence was growing more and more explosive, and Raphael broke it out of pure nervousness—

"Thank God he isn't going to die!"

Her retort was not relevant—

"Do you really expect me to fling away a heaven-sent chance and ruin my life for the sake of that old scoundrel?"

"I haven't said I expected anything."

"Oh, please don't talk nonsense! Haven't I told you that you've been asking me to do this for the last half-hour? Surely you're not so materialistic as to think that the only way of saying a thing is by stating it in words—and I wish you'd consider the matter from the sensible instead of the sentimental point of view. You seem to look upon Stanger

as a marvel of perjured innocence—don't you realize that the only reason he didn't put a knife into Andy was that I did it before he got a chance?"

Moore's temper rose——

"The fact remains that he didn't do it."

"And you'd send me to gaol to save him! Really, Raphael, this is the frozen limit! To think that you should dare—yes, dare—ask me to do such a thing! I once said that you had changed—I really thought you had. Now I see that you're still a prig—an utter consummate, unconscionable prig!"

"That's too bad!"—and Raphael also sprang up—"What do you mean?"

"I mean that only an utter prig could ask me to do this."

"Then what is a prig, if you please?"

"A prig is some one who tries to shut up the universe in his black hole of a conscience. Apparently you care more for your conscience than for me—rather than offend the precious thing you'll see me sent to gaol ruined, dead even. I tell you, only a prig could treat me like this. Your little box of conscience is a kind of Black Hole of Calcutta into which I and my life and my chances must pack . . . and I thought you were so different, somehow—I thought you'd changed . . . but now I see you're just the same as you always were"—and her fury died into a sob.

Raphael stood silent before her, crimson with misery and rage. His brain was in a whirl, and something at the back of it kept on telling him that he'd soon find a way to clear Stanger without involving Sally—while something else, farther back still, reiterated drearily that there was no other way, and that either Sally must stand forward and take her punishment, or Stanger would go to gaol for a crime he had never committed. Somehow he was disappointed in her, her rage was inglorious, her attitude of mind sophisticated. But he was not more disappointed in her than she was in him—his conduct was to her the whole bitterness of disillusion. She was not quite clear what course she would

have had him take—still, anything but this. She stared at him in a kind of horror—she had thought him changed, but here he was just as he had always been. There was no escaping the fact that his regeneration was only skin-deep, and that it merely required such a crisis as this to strip off the superficial salvation and show her, unsoftened and unaltered, the old hard priggishness which lay at the bottom of all her troubles.

"Well?" she asked abruptly.

He tried to be conciliating.

"Dear, just think how thankful we ought to be that Baird isn't dangerously wounded. If he died, your position would have been hideous——"

"And what is it now, please?"

"Well, you haven't got to choose between your life and Stanger's. I don't think the sentence for attempted murder is often very severe."

"Anything up to imprisonment for life, I believe."

"But this isn't an aggravated case——"

"How do you know what the judge will think?"

Raphael groaned. Bars of iron seemed suddenly to have dropped between them, and, with a pang, he realized that if he did not act promptly, the barrier might become permanent. He and Sally were not the couple for easy quarrels and quick reconciliations—he must not hesitate if the rift was to be healed. He could do one of two things—either let the business drop, and never till the end of his life allude to it again no matter how it tormented him, or persuade Sally to do what he now felt convinced was the only right and decent thing. For a moment the thought occurred to him that he might perhaps be able to offer himself as a sacrifice in her stead, but he dismissed it as a vain hope, outside the remotest bounds of possibility. Even the real culprit herself might have a hard struggle to clear Stanger, and the chances of any one who could not use all the evidence—as, for instance, that of the little boy at Goat Farm—and on whom had never rested the faintest shadow of suspicion, would

be hopeless. Such folly would only prejudice the authorities against Sally herself—if, on his failure, she chose to come forward—and Stanger would inevitably go to gaol. The only thing that could save him was the guilty person's own confession, and it was a choice between saving him by that and not saving him at all.

He tried to take her hand.

"My darling little Sally—just to show our great thankfulness for having been spared the worst, let's do the only proper, decent thing."

"It's all very well for you to speak in the plural—it isn't you who'll go to prison."

"I expect I shall. I've aided and abetted you in escaping the police. I shall probably be sent to gaol for that."

"Yes—two days ago you loved me enough to sin for me."

"But now I love you too much."

He came towards her with his arms outstretched, and something strange and tender in his eyes, which she had seen for the first time in that very place, one dusk that seemed a hundred years ago. She tried to escape from him, but the next minute he held her fast.

"I love you too much," he repeated, his mouth very close to hers.

"Don't, Raphael—don't!'

"You shan't be spotted with my sin. Do you think I could go through with this if I loved you only a little?"

She burst into tears, dreadful tears that choked her.

"Oh, my darling soul, can't you see how I love you? This dreadful thing proves it—I couldn't do this if I didn't love you unutterably. I want you so much to be good—to be God's."

But she only sobbed—"I can't."

He sat down by the fire, still holding her close. He had overcome by his gentleness the physical repulsion which had begun to assail her. Her arms clung about his neck and her face was hidden on his shoulder—but in her heart was an appalling terror, a sensation that she was at the mercy

of a fanatic whose love for her would only plunge him into greater brutalities. She was more afraid of him than she could ever have been of Andy—she could have wheedled Andy, there was no wheedling this cruelly gentle lover—she understood now how, in spite of his mildness, Neddy had sometimes been afraid of him. Men who are cruel from hatred or necessity are limited by those same hatreds and necessities, but there is no limit to the cruelty of the man who is cruel for conscience's sake.

As for Raphael, he had never realized so acutely the gulf between him and Sally—he was poles apart from the creature he clasped to his breast. It seemed as if all he had done was now to be undone, and Sally, after having been placed securely in his arms, was to be snatched from him for ever. If he lost her now, she would not come back. This parting would be final, because it would be a parting of the spirit. The mercilessness of it all fairly overwhelmed him. How simple it would have been for him to go to prison for her sake!—but that was not to be his ordeal—his ordeal was to send Sally to prison for the sake of a man who was a mere nonentity in both their lives—one of those ciphers by means of which fate sometimes chooses to alter the whole sum of existence.

Gradually Sally's sobs increased, so that Raphael was alarmed, and tried to soothe her.

"My darling, don't cry so—I can't bear it."

"I can't help crying . . . it's all so dreadful . . . like a horrible dream. Oh, Raphael, to think that you—*you* should ask me to do this!"

He groaned, and held her closer.

"Do you realize what it all means?" she continued, her voice torn with sobs. "It won't hurt Stanger to go to gaol—he's probably been there lots of times already. . . . But I—I shall be ruined—I shall lose my last chance. I believe that if I married you I could become a good woman, but if I go to prison—oh, I shall become quite like an animal—I shall die—die wickeder than I ever lived."

"My sweetheart, my pretty darling—I know it seems horrible—hopeless. But I can't believe things are as bad as they look. The most dreadful thing would be if we held our tongues and married and tried to live as if nothing had happened; then I think we would indeed die wickeder than we ever lived. I don't believe any suffering can harm you, Sally—you won't let it. So many things that look like the end are really the beginning."

"And then there's Andy," gasped Sally, "think of him—he'll be sent to gaol for perjury."

This was too much—and Raphael dropped his arms.

"As if I cared twopence for that!"

"Oh, it's all very well for you. But Andy lied to save me, and it would be damnable ingratitude to betray him."

Raphael refused to enter into an argument on Baird's character, of which Sally had always refused to take the only rational and decent view.

"Think of Stanger," he said—"if he goes to gaol, knowing his wife is in that villain's power. He has children, too, I dare say—think of them."

"She isn't really his wife—he has another at Portsmouth."

"He must feel towards her just the same," rejoined Raphael, too much in earnest to wonder why he understood things which a month ago would have scandalized him. "By the way he's behaved you can tell how he loves her—I expect for a man like him it's just the same. For heaven's sake, Sally, don't make it harder for me by forcing me to argue. I can't—you're far better at an argument than I."

"You underrate your capabilities—argue! Great Scot! you'd argue the hind legs off a horse. It's a pity you aren't a barrister—then you could be counsel for the prosecution. I'd go to gaol quick enough in that case. Oh, Raphael, I'm sorry!—don't be angry with me—don't look at me like that. I'm sorry—it was damnable of me."

He gently put her from him, and began to pace the room.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE STONE CRIETH OUT OF THE WALL

THE moon had risen and a white light glimmered through the fog, filling the Isle of Thorns with radiance. Somehow the cottage looked strange and unfamiliar—it was not exactly the unaccustomed firelight, or the ghostly shimmer of the fogs, but something vaguely hostile in the atmosphere. It was as if the spirit of the place had fled, and Raphael and Sally felt horribly alone.

Supper-time came, and once again Moore doled out the bread and cheese. Sally looked furtively at his stern face as she nibbled her portion.

"Raphael, shall I try and make you some Welsh rarebit?"

His sternness relaxed into misery—she wanted to propitiate him, and he had evidently fallen low enough in her estimation for her to consider his stomach the best centre of operations. Margaret had always relied on those methods—"you're tired"—her euphemism for "cross"—"dear, let me make you some cocoa." But he did not look for such materialism from Sally. With a start of suprise, he realized that he expected higher things from Sally than from Margaret; he saw now that he had done so unconsciously from the first.

With an exclamation of wretchedness she suddenly flung the cheese into the fire—

"Oh, please, Raphael, don't be so hard on me! I shall die if you don't forgive me!"

"I've nothing to forgive—and I'm not hard on you . . . only miserable."

In his eyes she saw that strange, terrifying, piteous thing

—a man's tears. She watched them as they swam there, giving his lids the peculiar red look which the mere approach of tears sometimes produces in those unused to crying—then she could stand it no longer—

"Have a cigarette," she said huskily, turning her head away.

The night wore on. The fog still lay round Isle of Thorns, stifling all the sounds of the dark Forest, so that Raphael and Sally sat in the midst of silence. The moon had set, leaving them in a fiery island washed by a sea of night. Raphael tried to recapture the feeling that a tent had been pitched over him and Sally. One would have thought it easier to imagine than on Plummers Plain, when they lay in the midst of vastness—not, as here, in a corner shut off from the rest of life. There was, however, one great difference—on Plummers Plain their foes had been outside them, now they were within. He himself was Sally's foe, persuading her to destruction; he had no power and no hope to pitch that blessed tent of dreams.

There was not, however, the slightest doubt in his mind that he was doing right, and the very simplicity of conscience which had made it so easy and sincere a thing for him to sin for her a day ago, now made it impossible. But he was overwhelmed by the thought of all he was condemning her to suffer. He was called to the most terrible of all the rites by which truth is worshipped, the sacrifice, not of himself, but of one ten thousand times dearer than himself. Till then he had not realized that the man who is prepared to do all must also be prepared to undo all.

Till nearly midnight they sat distrustfully side by side. Somehow each hoped that the other would reopen the subject, yet the minutes passed and neither spoke. At length they gave the matter up in despair. The last of Sally's cigarettes had been smoked, and Raphael suggested jerkily that they should try to get some sleep. Sally was about to protest, when a glance at his face choked her words—there was something grim in that profile, haggard with fatigue, and

something infinitely pathetic in those eyes that drooped and blinked for want of rest. She lay down, and he wrapped some of the underclothing in her bundle round her feet, and spread her coat over her shoulders. Then he went and lay down against the opposite wall, the red-hot fire between them.

At first, in spite of exhaustion, sleep was impossible. They both feigned it, lying stiffly, their legs stretched out, their arms straight at their sides, their eyes shut. Every now and then they glanced furtively across at each other, and once, when a puff of wind parted the flame, their eyes met. Then they both turned their faces to the wall.

In the wall, in the crumbling interstices of the bricks, lurked the sweet decays of Isle of Thorns. They crept soothingly to Raphael's nostrils, and brought strange joys to his memory. He remembered the long white road, the autumn copses, the tramping, the comrades, the thrills and the brave sorrows. . . . For a moment the scent of Isle of Thorns was inexplicably bound up with vagabondage—but he had hardly begun to notice it, when he fell asleep.

He woke some hours later, suddenly and completely. There was no delicious drowsing and dozing while the door of memory was kept on the chain. He had the sensation, not experienced for the first time, that a great deal had happened during sleep. The fire was singing faintly, and a crimson smear throbbed through the door on the fogs of the outer room. The scent of the wall was pungent—probably it was the damp that made it so. A kind of thrill ran through Raphael, he felt himself once more in the sanctuary of a spirit—a spirit of raillery, meekness, and mirth, young springing things, young singing things, the infinitely tender, wise, and bantering spirit of Isle of Thorns.

Sally lay asleep beyond the fire, her face and limbs flushed in the light, the heaving of her bosom expressed by a tender variation of shadows. He was seized with an infinite pity, and the tears stood in his eyes as he raised himself on his

elbow, and looked across at her. Poor child! poor little Sally!

His heartache was physical in its intensity. He loved her, and yet he was hurting her, wounding her almost to death. Then for the first time he doubted himself—was he going the right way to work? Was not a great deal of the pain they both suffered merely the consequence of his own bungling methods? He was asking her to sacrifice herself out of a purely abstract sense of duty. He realized now what had never occurred to him before—that she might not have it. He had made no attempt to bring anything warm or living into his arguments, he had not realized that duty in a disembodied state was not likely to appeal to that poor desperate girl, with all her rioting passions, her seething love of adventure.

Why not appeal to her love of adventure?

He looked round, and shivered slightly. There was something uncanny about Isle of Thorns—he had never been there before at night, and it seemed almost as if a voice from the old stones was crying—"Why not appeal to her love of adventure?"

Once before the cottage had pleaded with him, when it bade him remember he was Sally's only friend. Now again he seemed to hear its voice—calling to him from the chimney, whispering to him from the wall.

Why not appeal to her love of adventure?

He sat up, his arm round his knees, his eyes fixed on the fire. Somehow he hated the idea of turning to her lower nature when her highest had failed him. Her love of adventure was what had got her into all her trouble—it lay at the bottom of all her misery and his. It was surely the last thing he ought to appeal to.

But was it her lower nature? Though it had dragged her through fire and water, flung her into every antic and evil, was it not the strongest, truest, purest passion in her, beside which his poor petty sense of duty and scruples of conscience were burnt out as by a great white blaze?

Then a storm of memories rushed upon him—which were all now, somehow, part of the ruin of the Forest, as if it had taken to itself all that was abnormal in his life and united it to the pungent scents and sweet stuffiness of its walls—the woods of Lindfield and Ardinglye, with the sun-warm fruit in the hedges, the smell of frosty stagnant dew, the taste of the thick evening air—the stars through the chinks in a barn, the great white highway winding to the sea, his cheery comrades who thought neither of to-morrow nor yesterday, his own fist clenched in a scoundrel's face—all were now, somehow, part of Isle of Thorns, all cried to him not to be a young thing with an old heart—all were telling him that where youth and life and adventure are, there is the spirit of God.

Then Sally woke.

She had had distressing dreams—all night long she had felt herself falling through wind and space, past burst and roaring stars, longing in vain for a foothold of solid ground. At last out of her dreams came a sky, shining with a myriad stars, like the sky over Plummers Plain. Towards the east stood a horseman, in glittering armour, with lance at rest—"Oh, Faithful and True!—Faithful and True!—Save me!" Her old cry, long silent, seemed to bubble up through the void. The next minute she had fallen back into chaos, sinking and tossing, before her eyes the vision of two men fighting—wooden and expressionless—"click clack—click clack."

She woke with a start, and looked across to where Raphael was sitting.

"What time is it?"

"I don't know—I should say about five or six."

"I can't go to sleep again—I'm frightened."

She made the statement with pathetic matter-of-factness.

"I'm so sorry, darling—what can I do?"

"Nothing—unless"—and she looked steadfastly at him—"you stop it."

"If you ask me to, I must. But Sally, do you realize what it will mean?"

She shook her head.

"It will mean that till the end of our lives you and I will have something between us."

"And you think that if I go to gaol we shall have nothing between us?—that's a strange thought."

"But I think it."

"You're a strange man, Raphael, altogether. I never could have imagined you had so much of the unexpected about you. I wonder you care to waste your breath on me. When you think of the kind of woman I am—and all the things I've done—it seems foolish to expect me suddenly to pass a pretty stiff examination in general nobility."

"I should say that people who could do regularly—er—awful things would be the likeliest sort to do regularly splendid ones."

Sally whistled, but the whistle did not get far.

"Let's have breakfast," she said, "I'm hungry."

The light was breaking through the mists, which still lay heavy and sodden round the cottage. Raphael stirred up the fire, brought fresh wood, and began to toast a slice of bread on the end of his pocket-knife.

"This fog's a bit awkward," he said. "I shan't be able to get to Towncreep while it lasts, and the provisions are running low."

"But surely we aren't going to stay here any longer. This place isn't exactly one's idea of comfort—to say nothing of the general compromisingness of the situation—you seem to have forgotten that"—and she laughed mirthlessly—"wonders will never cease."

"I have forgotten nothing," he retorted, "and if you go on like this—I never shall."

"Please don't be angry with me, Raphael—I know I'm a beast, but I can't help it."

She took her toast and a slice of meat, and went and sat against the opposite wall. He remembered how, the day be-

fore, he had fought with her soul while he held her body in his arms. Even that exterior link was broken now—the fire was between them.

The daylight deepened, and still they sat apart, speaking very little. A redness shot into the fogs, and for a moment they scattered. The cold sweet morning blew into Isle of Thorns, the delicious rawness of a young October day.

Then suddenly something seemed to give way in Raphael's heart. . . .

"Sally—what an experience, what an adventure it would be—to go to prison!"

"Hullo, Raphael! This is new—yes; and what an adventure it would be to be hanged. What excitement to have a rope round your neck and a bag over you head!—Thanks awfully!"

"But can't you see?—don't you understand?—The thing that you dread will be such a thrilling experience for you."

"Really, my dear boy, this is so sudden. I never thought you approved of the adventurous spirit."

"I've changed my mind—I'm always changing my mind nowadays," he added pathetically.

"I'm very glad—but I'm afraid you aren't any nearer persuading me. I'm sorry to have to say it, as I expect this is your forlorn hope—but, Raphael, it's no use—I'm beyond hope, forlorn or otherwise."

Raphael bit his lip and said nothing. Outside the mists were moving in the wind, and the cry of the sheep on the Forest broke through them. Sally continued after a pause—

"Don't try to persuade me any more. You're asking me to achieve the impossible—don't ask it. Let the whole thing drop, and in course of time we may forget it."

Her words stung him out of his despondency.

"Sally, what an awful picture!—what an impossible one! We'll never forget, and if we stop now we're divided for ever. There's a wall between us, of words—words, words, words, all the words in the dictionary—and the only means of clearing them away is—is——"

He did not often indulge in metaphor, and now found himself unable to complete this one. Instinct was too strong for Sally, and she flung herself on his unfinished effort—

"Is by building a temple out of them, into which we can creep together."

"And offer our sacrifice."

He had completed his metaphor after all, and it gave him a delirious kind of courage—

"We must, Sally. We can't escape. The only means of saving ourselves from this dividing heap of words is, as you say, to build a temple out of them—and a temple is for sacrifice. Let's build a temple to experience, and sacrifice—ourselves."

He saw that she was touched, and realized bitterly that it was not so much by what he had said as by the way he had said it. For practically the first time he had clothed his thoughts with symbolic splendour, and she, weak woman, was dazzled at once. It was all part and parcel of this appeal to her lower nature, to her love of adventure which had so far failed to proclaim itself divine.

"Raphael, for the first time you make me wish it were possible—but it's not."

Just as he'd thought! She was responding to the cheap persuasion after his loftier appeals had failed. In disgust he felt inclined to give up the whole affair—but the new idea died hard.

"And the fact that it seems impossible—doesn't that make it all the more thrilling?"

"Does it thrill *you*?"

"Indeed it doesn't"—but the next moment he hesitated, struck by the fact that it did. He was indeed strangely thrilled. Hitherto it had been only the older, staler part of him that had welcomed suffering, now it was all that was strongest in him of zeal and youth. The boy in him, whom he had thought long dead, showed himself hilariously alive in the face of pain. He realized that if the new idea had not

had power with Sally it had power with himself, and the next moment his discovery rose like a torrent to his lips.

"Sally, it does thrill me—it thrills me all over. Can't you see what it means? You told me months ago that you'd come into Sussex and done a dozen mad things to help you find yourself—you couldn't get on any longer as you were, so you came out to seek adventure. Well, now you've found it—a great adventure—the greatest adventure of all."

"Raphael, you're an extraordinary, surprising young man."

"No one's more surprised than I am. But I can't help saying this—it's inside me, somehow. Look what adventure has done for me—my poor little hole-in-a-corner adventure, my tramp from Lindfield to Selsey. It's made a new man of me—you yourself have seen that—and think what this great new adventure will do for us both!"

She laughed feebly.

"But it hurts so——"

"Of course it does—it wouldn't be an adventure if it didn't. Oh, Sally, don't you remember how once you said that now's the time to get experiences, because, for all we know, certain experiences belong only to this life—and if we miss them here we miss them for ever? You even asked me what we were here for if it wasn't to collect as many experiences as possible. Well, don't you think that one, that the greatest of these is—suffering?"

"Hullo, Raphael! You surely don't think that's only to be had in this world. I thought you believed in hell-fire and pitchforks and all that sort of thing."

"But that isn't what I mean—I mean free suffering, the suffering that comes to one through love. I shouldn't wonder if that was to be had nowhere but here. Every chance of it you miss will deaden your capacity for it, and think how awful if you should miss it altogether, and go through the ages of eternity without it . . . without ever having suffered!"

"My dear Raphael, you've exhausted surprise, and—and you frighten me now. May I ask if these words of wisdom

have been stored in your mind for ages, or are they—er—extempore?"

"They're from my heart, anyhow—oh, Sally, you can't miss this tremendous chance which has been sent you—why, you said so yourself!"

"But this isn't the chance I meant."

"No—it's far finer."

She was silent a moment, then she muttered—

"I said you'd argue the hind legs off a horse, and indeed a certain poor donkey doesn't seem to have much to stand on."

"At first I thought I was appealing to your lower nature. Now I see what a fool I was to think that. I'm appealing to all that is best and bravest in you, my brave darling."

"Don't, Raphael, don't!" He saw that she was trembling, and his next words stuck in his throat.

"Oh, I can't," she wailed—"I can't—I can't."

It was her old hopeless cry, but strange to say it told him more clearly than anything else that victory was at hand. There was a note of surrender in its panic-stricken obstinacy which made him realize that he was beginning to conquer. He was terrified, and found it hard not to draw back.

"Oh, Raphael!—don't—don't."

She sprang up suddenly, and dashed to him through the very midst of the fire. Red, glowing embers, tossed against the walls, suddenly flamed up and flickered on the fogs of the outer room.

"Don't, Raphael—I can't bear it—don't persuade me—I'm frightened."

She flung her arms round him, and hid her face on his breast. She had come to him because she was terrified of him. Her hands piteously stroked his neck; they were pleading with him to save her from himself. He felt that at his next word the balance would drop, either back to where he was before, with no more to be said, or into the great climax of their lives. Had he the heart to persuade her?—now that at last he had power, could he be so cruel as to use it? Dare

he adopt the merciless tactics of the top dog? Holding Sally to him more as if he were her mother than her lover, he glanced round him, at the walls eccentrically lighted by the flickering of a dozen scattered brands. Then suddenly he dropped his eyes—lifting her face that they might look into hers—

"Sally dearest . . . you daren't go out of the world without having experienced the highest adventure it has to give. People who live in the world and avoid suffering are like people who go to church but never take the Holy Communion . . . you and I have never had Holy Communion together."

Her eyes did not move from his, it seemed almost as if by means of them she was trying to draw strength from him to herself—strength to resist him or to surrender to him? If it was the former she failed, if the latter she triumphed gloriously.

Then a strange thing happened. Their positions were suddenly reversed, and it was as if Raphael were the vanquished and Sally the conqueror. She sat up and shook her hair out of her face, tossing her head and looking at him with clear unflinching eyes. Though she had been terrified at her fate before it was inevitable, now that she had made it so she faced it gamely, while he, on the other hand, was humbled and abashed by the victory he had won. It was as if the sublime fact of her childbearing should assert itself in every crisis of a woman's life, so that as soon as her travail was over she should face the future with gladness and courage—forgetting the past which the man who loved her could never forget.

CHAPTER XXX

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

THE fog was once more banking round the cottage.

The parting at dawn had been only a temporary response to the sunrise, and now the curd-like wall was piling up again, shutting all the day and its changes into one thick silence. It would not be much use to leave the Isle of Thorns till it had cleared, as they would probably only lose their way on the Forest; and though each was anxious to "get things over" as soon as possible they both worshipped almost superstitiously the time they had still left together.

They did not speak much, but sat with their arms round each other while the fog rolled in at the window and fought with the poor remains of the fire. Somehow, Sally was still afraid of Raphael, but in a different way. She had now come subtly to like this kind of moral fear, just as she had come to like her physical fear of Andy. She still thought of him as a prig, but she saw in his new priggishness, not a relapse into a lower state, but a step forward into a higher. She realized that there is practically no such thing as direct progress, and that human character, like most things, evolves in spirals—old states are met again and again on higher and higher levels and Raphael had returned to his old priggishness on a level higher than his recent outbreak of daring.

The silence of the mist continued in such peace that, after a time, even the few words they uttered seemed like the breaking of a sabbath. At last they both fell asleep, their fingers interlaced, their heads childishly drooping together.

Sally woke first with a start that woke Raphael. The room was full of light—pure, watery, ethereal. They both looked

up, and saw a sky luminous with the sunshine of late afternoon, and strayed over with little flocks and fleeces of scattering mist.

Sally freed herself from Raphael's sleepy arms.

"We'd better go at once and get it over—part of it over, I mean. Oh, Raphael, if they won't believe me at the police-station, you must help me rub it in. That'll be the greatest temptation of all—to let oneself be disbelieved."

"I think we'll convince them all right—enough to make them detain us, I mean."

With refreshing matter-of-factness, he got up and began to brush his clothes, then tried to smooth his hair which was rumpled wildly over his face and in which more than one hairpin was entangled.

"I'm afraid I'll have to be disreputable," said Sally. "I'm past combing or brushing into anything like decency. I break all records for getting into the maximum of mess in the minimum of time—but I dare say you'll be respectable enough for both. What a pity you need a shave so badly!—come to me, and I'll arrange your parting."

He knelt down beside her, and stooped over her, while she took his comb. That was the advantage of a man who had been married before—he expected these little domesticities of one, even when the skies were falling. She had never combed a man's hair before—Andy had never asked her—he did things for her, not she for him. Raphael's hair was very thick and black and straight—on decorous occasions it was also very smooth and sleek, though it had endless possibilities of roughness. Sally looked at him critically, her head on one side, to see if the precious parting was straight. His face was very close to hers—and suddenly something rushed into her heart which had been there only once before, when she watched him sleep on Plummers Plain. With a little moan she put up her arms, and drew his head down to her bosom, holding it there with her hands. A great thrill passed through her. It was the first time her womanhood had claimed its rights—hitherto it had been he who held her and

sustained her; but now that he had vanquished her, fettered her at last, she took the kingdom and the glory from him, drawing him to her breast.

They neither of them spoke; his eyes were shut, and on his face was an expression she had not seen there before. His cheek looked almost swarthy against the white stuff of her blouse; she kissed it, queerly delighted at its roughness under her mouth, and ran her fingers through his hair.

Sobs were stifling in her breast, shaking her all over—she felt as if she could never hold him close enough, and as if her arms must break with their clinging just as her heart was breaking with its loving and its pitying. Then suddenly he lifted himself almost brusquely, and slipped from her embrace. She made no effort to restrain him, though her eyes filled, because she wondered when she would hold him thus again. He had doubtless lain like that many times in Margaret's arms, but such moments were beautifully, terribly new to her.

She started when he came up and put a piece of bread in her hand—

"Come, dear, you must eat something before we go."

"I couldn't, Raphael."

"But you must—you're tired. I'm going to eat, too. It's the afternoon now, and we've had nothing since breakfast. We must keep up our strength, you know."

She took the food, less out of obedience than a foolish craving for respite. Their happiness would now last the length of a meal. He sat down beside her, so close that when he ate she could feel his cheek moving against hers.

"Raphael, this is our last meal together."

"For a time. We shall have many meals together afterwards, I hope."

"Afterwards!" she groaned.

"Ever afterwards."

The sun was dipping to the west, and the light was fading from the inner room, but outside the thorn-bushes glowed in a bath of crimson radiance, in which it was hard to say

which was the most mysterious, they or their shadows. Raphael had finished, but Sally was still struggling with her bread.

"I can't eat any more—will you eat half?"

"No. Certainly not."

"Oh, yes you will, Raphael. . . . 'You and I have never had Holy Communion together.'"

He looked at her without understanding.

"Yes," she continued, "the first time I was driven away by your goodness, the second time by my own badness—there's nothing to divide us now."

"But——"

"Oh, Raphael, I do so want to take the Sacrament with you before our pain and separation begin—it would help me in a way nothing else could. I've always wanted to take the Sacrament with you, but something, either of yours or mine, has always kept me away. This is our last chance—for how long, I shouldn't like to say . . . and what better occasion can we have for a Communion than . . . our last meal together?"

Her voice faltered to tears, as she broke the bread with her cold trembling hands, and held it to his mouth.

"This is the pledge . . . that nothing can divide us any more. . . ."

He hesitated a moment. Then he took the bread—making the sign of the Cross.

* * * * *

Fragments of mist were flying down the slopes of the Forest, curdling in the hollows, hanging in rags and ribbons on the branches of the pines. The afternoon was dying gently into the sunset—clear rainy sweeps of sky were spread over the woods, and the west was hung with wavy colours. The wind blew into Isle of Thorns, scented with the damp steaming copses of the weald. Water was pouring from the roof and walls, making honey-coloured pools among the flags—in the outer room, a great pond lay under the hole in the roof, and reflected the lustreless horns of the moon. Raphael and Sally paused there before they left the cottage, just to

recall the evening they had had tea there together and coughed in the smoke. The hearth was now covered with pieces of brick and chips of mortar, dislodged by the storm, and smelling bitter with the wet.

On the threshold Sally suddenly stood still—

"Raphael . . . if I'm sent to prison for a long time, I don't want you to think yourself bound to me—it wouldn't be fair."

"Don't speak like that. What have I done that you should think me a cad?"

"It may be years and years."

"Nonsense, my sweet! Under the circumstances, I'm sure it won't be more than a few months. And then—think, dearest! Think of our life together—think of the great new experience we shall share. We shall know and understand things which we could never have grasped before . . . we shall know and understand—each other . . . and—ourselves."

She looked up at him, her eyes full of love and wonder. Then the tears rushed into them—

"Raphael—how can you do so much for . . . hope so much from . . . a woman like me?"

He could not speak at once—he pulled her to him, and held her as if he would never let her go.

"In life, in death, Sally, you will always be my dearest one, my honoured one—the woman who lifted me out of my past, who saved me from my prejudices, who taught me to play the man, to use my fists, to love my child—the woman who redeemed me."

His words seemed to her too preposterous to contradict. She only laughed. Then suddenly her expression changed—

"Come, Raphael—I'm ready. We must start now . . . and as it's our last chance for some time—let's *run*."

They took hands, and raced down the Forest slope, through the sweet sodden grass, laughing and panting. The wind sang in their ears and the sun was on their faces, for the high ridges of Ashdown were still flushed with light. They ran past the road to Allfornought and the turning to Towncreep,

gasping and floundering in the heather and tall tawny bracken. Then they passed out of the sunshine, still running, and the twilight swallowed them up.

THE END